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# Calcutta : Myths and History

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SUBARNAREKHA  
CALCUTTA

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*To my parents on their fiftieth  
Wedding Anniversary*



## PREFACE

This is a collection of essays on urban history of Calcutta. Two of these had already been published and I am grateful to Cambridge University Press and the editorial board of *Modern Asian Studies*, Cambridge, for allowing us to reprint them here. The last essay is a preliminary report of our pilot survey of Calcutta in 1806 with the aid of Computer.

I am grateful to the Australian Research Grants Council and the University of Sydney for providing me with funds for our research project. I wish to acknowledge the help and cooperation that I received from the librarians, record keepers, curators and the staff of the following organizations : National Archives of India, National Library, State Archives of West Bengal, Victoria Memorial Hall and the Library and Records Room, Corporation of Calcutta. I am particularly grateful to Sri Priya Gupta, formerly Commissioner, Calcutta Corporation, for allowing me to microfilm the House Assessment Books. I am also indebted to Saurin Roy, formerly Deputy Director of Archives, National Archives of India, and to Chittaranjan Banerjee, formerly Deputy Librarian, National Library, for comments and advice. Hitesh R. Sanyal of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, has helped me to identify many caste names. Prathama Sen, Kathie Robinson, and Denise Hare have helped me with research. We are indebted to Brian Rowswell of the Computer Centre, University of Sydney, for his help with the Computer program.

This survey would not have been possible without the aid of Alison Errington and Victoria Worstead. They are in fact co-authors of the survey but are not responsible for my mistakes.

Sri Sati Ranjan De Sarkar has typed the survey including the Tables. Sri Mihir Maity of City College, Calcutta, has helped me with the maps. I am most grateful to Sri Radharaman Mitra for his advice.

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## CLASS, CASTE AND POLITICS IN CALCUTTA, 1815 – 38\*

### I

Some years ago Professor Morris-Jones suggested that contemporary Indian politics should be looked upon as a tale of three political idioms, 'modern', 'traditional' and 'saintly'.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I shall attempt to show that, in Calcutta in the 1820s and 1830s, the politics of the Bengali elites of the *bhadralok* class, was conducted in two idioms, which I shall also call 'modern' and 'traditional'. The term politics is used here to mean collective human action performed with a power perspective. In politics men aim at gaining authority and influence over certain areas of human activity. This concept of politics does not preclude the role of ideas ; many men were inspired, stirred into action by some great ideas, but they all aimed at gaining power, if only to implement their ideas. In the nineteenth century the political destiny of Bengal was controlled by the British, and no section of the population (with the exception of a small segment of the Bengali Muslim peasantry led by the revivalist *Faraidis*)<sup>2</sup> was willing or able to challenge the British authority, least of all the Calcutta elite. There were, however, many less important areas of power which were controlled by the Indians and the elite groups competed to gain this control.

By the 'modern' idioms of politics I mean agitation through the press, public meetings, and petitions to settle public issues. The public issues that were important to the Indians were concerned with English education, *sati*, the right of the Indians to sit as jurors, the defence of private property, and the demand for

\* This paper was read at a seminar in Cambridge in 1968 and was published in E. R. Leach & S. N. Mukherjee, (ed.) *Elites in South Asia*, Cambridge, 1970. I am grateful to Dorothy Mukherjee for typing the first draft.

1 W. H. Morris-Jones. 'India's political idioms', in C. H. Philips (ed.) *Politics and Society in India*. London, 1963, p. 135.

2 Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the demand for Pakistan*, Bombay, 1963, pp. 17–18.



a better position, for Indians in the British India administration. The two main groups involved in agitation on such public issues were described as 'liberals' and 'tories' in a contemporary magazine.<sup>1</sup> Although this view has been accepted by some modern historians<sup>2</sup> I shall endeavour to show that such political labels had only a limited application in the 1820s and 1830s of the last century in Calcutta.

There was another area of collective activity, almost hidden, in which the Calcutta elite were engaged. This activity was beyond the control and knowledge of the British administrators. In this area caste rules were important, particularly those rules concerning marriage, pollution and inheritance. It seems that in the eighteenth century all matters related to caste were settled through 'caste cutcherries',<sup>3</sup> and leading men in Calcutta like Madan Datta and Nubkissen competed with each other to gain control of such 'cutcherries'.<sup>4</sup> In the nineteenth century the 'cutcherries' were replaced by *dals* (*de facto* social factions). The *dalapatis* (leading members of the *dals*) tried to control men by using the instruments of social sanction of excommunication, through the *dals*. I shall call such activities politics conducted through a traditional idiom, since they involved competition among elite groups in order to gain control over men and matters. This fits Morris-Jones's definition of the 'traditional' language of politics, it is the language 'of a particular kind of highly developed status society' and it is acted upon more than it is spoken about.<sup>5</sup>

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century no other Indian elite group was so active in public affairs and in such numbers as the elites of the *bhadralok* class in Calcutta; even Bombay was a decade or two behind Calcutta in this res-

1 *Alexander's East India Magazine and Colonial and Commercial Journal*, London, Vol. I, Dec. 1830 to June 1831, p. 48.

2 A. F. S. Ahmed, *Social Ideas and social change in Bengal 1818-1835*, Leiden, 1965, pp. 27-31.

3 H. Verelst, *View of the Rise, progress and present state of the government in Bengal, including a reply to the misrepresentation of Mr. Bolts and other writers*. London, 1772, pp. 27-8.

4 For the rivalry between the two families, see N. N. Ghosh, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*, Calcutta, 1901, pp. 141-9.

5 Morris-Jones, 'India's political idioms', p. 138.

pect. In 1815 Rammohun Roy established his *Atmiya Sabha*, the first organization of its kind, which deliberately set out to reform Hindu religion and society ; the members discussed both the nature of God and his various attributes and debated on social problems concerning caste, pollution and *sati*. In 1817 many well-to-do Bengalis, some of whom were very orthodox, joined with some non-official Europeans to establish the Hindu College, which had a far-reaching effect on the social history of Calcutta and Bengal. This was to be followed by the foundation of the School Book Society and the School Society which played a prominent part in improving primary education in Calcutta if not in Bengal. They printed new textbooks, opened new types of schools which held annual examinations, laying the foundations for a new educational system. The emphasis was on English, mathematics, geography, natural sciences and English history, at both the primary and the higher level. Many schools and higher educational seminaries, like the Bishops' College, Rammohun's Anglo-Hindu School, the Oriental Seminary, the Sanskrit College and, most important, the Calcutta Medical College, were established during this period. An Indian press both in English and in vernacular languages was established in 1818 ; by the end of a decade it had refined itself into an effective political weapon, maintaining a small but steady circulation and providing a livelihood for a fairly large number of journalists and printers. Pamphlet wars were waged between rival groups, agitating for and against the abolition of *sati* or debating on the Bengali's right to alienate property without the family consent. Calcutta Town Hall witnessed many spectacular public meetings, often attended by up to 1,000 men, where European free traders joined with the Indians to protest against such issues as the restrictions on a free press, and administrative reforms.

Rammohun's *Atmiya Sabha* was to be used as a model by his supporters and his opponents. Many *sabhas* and *samitis* (societies) were formed during this period to further the cause of social and religious reform, for literary discussions and above all for political agitation. Although a large number of such societies were founded by the young students of the Hindu College, more serious ones were organized by their elders. One such organization was the *Dharma Sabha*, which was formed in 1830

in the wake of a great agitation against the abolition of *sati*. Lord Bentinck inadvertently gave the Bengalis a chance to learn the techniques of agitation which were to be used later for more worthy causes. Finally, in 1838 the European free traders, Indian *zamindars*, Hindus and Muslims, conservatives and reformers united to defend the landed property in Bengal. The orthodox members now had the opportunity to put their experience in the *Dharma Sabha* to better use. This interest in public affairs, unusual by Indian standards in the early nineteenth century, sprang from a social transformation brought about by a number of factors, chiefly the economic changes in the eighteenth century. The society was being transformed from a status and relatively closed society where social and political relationships were determined by caste and customs, to a relatively open and competitive society where social relationships were largely shaped by class. However, caste remained important—social prestige was still attached to it and inheritance laws were determined by caste. Indian politics in Calcutta during this period, 1815–38, were shaped by both class and caste, and, since rural Bengal left its mark on Calcutta despite rapid urbanization, the ‘traditional’ language of politics was as important as the ‘modern’ language of politics.

## II

In the late-eighteenth and the early-nineteenth centuries Calcutta, like Forster’s Chandrapore, was divided into two worlds, southern or European and northern or native. The vast differences between the European town and the ‘black town’, as the Indian quarter was called, struck many European observers.<sup>1</sup> The European town was, as Sir William Jones said, ‘large, airy and commodious’, the houses were ‘in general well built and some of them equal to palaces’.<sup>2</sup> The ‘black town’ in contrast was overcrowded with men living in badly built, unimpressive houses; with few exceptions even the houses of the opulent Indians were not built to please the eye.<sup>3</sup>

1 C. Finch, ‘Vital statistics of Calcutta’, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London (J.S.S.L.)* Vol. 13, 1850, p. 168.

2 S. N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: a study in eighteenth-century British attitudes to India*, Cambridge, 1968, p. 77.

3 C. Finch, ‘Vital statistics of Calcutta’, pp. 168–9.

At the apex of the social and political pyramid were the Europeans of the southern part of the city. Although the worlds were not yet as segregated as they were in Forster's Chandrapore, European contact with the Indians was more official and less social. The aloofness of the Europeans was scoffed at in the eighteenth century by the famous Indo-Muslim historian, Ghulam Hussain,<sup>1</sup> and Rammohun Roy,<sup>2</sup> the social reformer, was aware of it. However, the Europeans were not a homogeneous body ; many non-official free traders, journalists, businessmen, and missionaries, men like David Hare, James Silk Buckingham and William Adam, had a greater contact with upper classes of Indian society. Indians on their part were eager to establish such contacts and many ventures in education, journalism, religious reform and business, were jointly started by the Indians and the non-official Europeans.

The vital statistics of Calcutta have never been very reliable. Even the census of 1872 could not be accepted as accurate.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is not possible to make a satisfactory numerical study of the process of urbanization. We have no reliable set of figures from which we could measure the rate of population growth of Calcutta, the rate of literacy, the change in age groups, occupational patterns, sex ratio, and the religious composition of the population. But, ever since 1752 when Holwell first put out his figures, many attempts had been made to enumerate and classify the population of Calcutta. Earlier estimates gave very high figures for the Indian population of Calcutta.<sup>4</sup> However, we have more reliable statistics for Calcutta from about 1821. It was then reported that there were 179,917 people living in Calcutta, of whom 118,203 were Hindus, 48,162 Muslims,

1 Ghulam Hussain, *Sair Mutaqharin* (Eng. trans), Calcutta, 1789. Vol. 2, pp. 587-91.

2 S.N. Mukherjee. 'The social implications of the political thought of Raja Rammohun Roy' in R.S. Sharma (ed), *Kosambi Memorial volume*, Delhi, 1974.

3 W. H. Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal*, Vol. 1, *District of 24 Parganas and Sundarbans*, London, 1875, p. 17.

4 The following estimates were made by various people in the nineteenth century. 1801 : 1,625,000 ; 1802 : 600,000 ; 1810 : 10,000,00 ; 1819 : 750,000. See William Adam, *Reports on the state of education in Bengal* (1835 and 1838) (ed. A. N. Basu), Calcutta, 1941, p. 5.

13,138 Christians and 414 Chinese.<sup>1</sup> This figure was much lower than the one given by Dwarkanath Tagore to R. Montgomery Martin and the figure supplied by the magistrates.<sup>2</sup> But, when we compare these figures with the estimates made in 1837 by W. Birch, the Superintendent of Police in Calcutta, on the basis of the reports made by the assessors of the house tax,<sup>3</sup> it seems that the assessors in 1821 were not very far out.

Table 1<sup>3</sup>

English	3,138	Western Hindus	17,333
Euro-Asians	4,746	Bengali Hindus	120,318
Portuguese	3 181	Moguls	527
French	160	Parsees	40
Chinamen	362	Arabs	351
Armenians	636	Mugs	683
Jews	307	Madrasees	55
Western Muslims	13,677	Native Christians	49
Bengali Muslims	45,067	Low Castes	19,054
			Total 229,714

Two interesting facts emerge from these figures. Between 1821 and 1837, the population of the city of Calcutta grew very rapidly, by nearly 50,000. Although the rate of population growth was marginal by twentieth-century standards, the figures do indicate that Calcutta was a growing and thriving city, where

- 1 *Census of India 1961 ; Report of the population estimates of India (1820–1830)* (ed D. Bhattacharya and B. B Bhattacharya), New Delhi, 1963, pp. 234–5) It was estimated that another 100,000 entered Calcutta daily, excluding the handful who travelled to and from the city by carriages and horses. The number was reached by the estimate of the houses in Calcutta and checking the people at each important entrance to the City. As far as we know these figures have never been cross-checked with the consumption of salt and other methods used by James Prinsep in Benaras.
- 2 Tagore's informers suggested that there were 53,005 houses, in which some 300,000 people lived. See R. Montgomery Martin. *Statistics of the Colonies of the British Empire in the West Indies, South America, North America, Asia, Australia, Africa, and Europe. From the official records of the Colonial Office*, London, 1839, p. 209. For the figures for the years 1822 and 1828 see *Census of India 1961*, pp. 234–5, *P. P. H. C.* 1831, V. 320A. Appendix no. 42,762 ; and A.F.S. Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal 1818–1835*, p. 11.
- 3 C. Finch, 'Vital statistics of Calcutta', p. 172. Please note that the total number given here excluded the people who entered the city daily and also those who lived in the suburbs of Calcutta.

many men came looking for jobs. This fact is partially confirmed by the imperfect set of figures that we now have on sex ratios and age groups. As far as can be ascertained, the majority of people in Calcutta were male and adult. According to one estimate there were 61.6 Hindu women to 100 Hindu men and a corresponding figure for Muslim women was 50.8. Calcutta also had fewer children than an average European city.<sup>1</sup> The process continued in the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> If increasing male immigration is a sign of urbanization then the process started very early in Calcutta.<sup>3</sup>

Another interesting fact emerges from these figures. Although Calcutta always had a heterogeneous population consisting of many communities from the very beginning, the bulk of the population were Bengali Hindus. Bengali Muslims formed the second largest community in Calcutta. According to figures given for 1798, the Muslim population in Calcutta increased at a faster rate than the Hindu population between 1798 and 1837.<sup>4</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that owing to lack of protein in the diet and ritual bathing in the Ganges the mortality rate was higher among Hindus than among Muslims.<sup>5</sup> But this slightly higher rate of increase among Muslims did not change the social structure of Calcutta. The 'black town' remained predominantly a Bengali Hindu city. The total Bengali Muslim population was still less than half the total Bengali Hindu population.

What is more significant, however, is the fact that the upper and middle part of the social and economic pyramid of Indian society in Calcutta was dominated by Hindus. Only a small

1 C Finch, *loc. cit.* p. 173.

2 It was estimated in 1866 that the majority of the population belonged to the age group of 16–40. In 1872 Hunter suggested that 67 per cent of the population were male adults. *Report on the Census of Calcutta 1866*, Calcutta, 1866, pp. 15–16. Cf. W.W. Hunter, *A statistical account of Bengal*, Vol. 1, pp. 38–44.

3 Kingsley Davis, *The population of India and Pakistan*, Princeton, N.Y. 1951, pp. 139–41.

4 Abstracting from Police magistrate's reports, Hamilton suggested that there were, in Calcutta, in 1798, some 14,700 Muslims and some 56,460 Hindus. W. Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer*, London, 1815, p. 137.

5 C. Finch, 'Vital statistics of Calcutta', pp. 174–5; Cf. W. H. Sykes, 'On the population and mortality of Calcutta', *J S.S.L.*, Vol. 8, 1845, p. 51.

number of Muslims took an interest in public affairs and had some weight in society, either because they were rich merchants and landowners, or because they were *vakils* in the Sadr Dewani Adalat or teachers at the Calcutta Madrasa or Fort William College. Some of these men, like Maulavi Karim Hussain, played an active and useful role in the committees of the Calcutta School Book Society and Calcutta School Society. But the majority of leading Muslims were non-Bengalis. It is interesting to note that some of the Muslim members of the School Book Society were eager to promote the interest of 'Hindustani' in both Persian and Nagari scripts and of a school situated in an area dominated by the non-Bengali Muslim community.<sup>1</sup> This fact needs some explanation. Ever since 1870 when W. W. Hunter published his famous work on *The Indian Musalmans*,<sup>2</sup> there had been a widely accepted thesis about the so-called 'Muslim backwardness' in Bengal and in India. It is generally thought that the Muslims were dispossessed when the British took over the administration of the province. The successive administrative reforms took away the remaining privileges held by the Muslims, consequently the community remained hostile towards British rule, and their rather conservative religion strengthened their dislike of western rule, western education and western culture. So, we are told, the Muslim response being totally negative, they failed to produce a leadership willing to inaugurate English education and social reform among the Muslims. Some scholars have even cited the Muslim peasant revolts as examples of this kind of Muslim response.<sup>3</sup>

The administrative reforms started by Warren Hastings and consolidated by Cornwallis dispossessed many powerful men in Bengal. But under the Mughal rule, in the *suba* of Bengal, Muslims never had a monopoly in all branches of administration. Undoubtedly they held the highest executive positions in government and controlled the army and the administration of criminal justice (*nizamet*). But the Hindus were not a deprived class.

1 W. Adam, *Reports on the state of education in Bengal*, pp. 12–13.

2 W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, London, 1870.

3 A. F. S. Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal*, pp. 18–19. Cf. A. R. Mallik, *British Policy and the Muslim in Bengal, 1757–1858*, Dacca, 1961, pp. 166–93.

They monopolized the administration of the revenue (*dewani*). A reading of *Sair Mutaqharin* shows that a considerable number were employed as *foujdars* and as generals in the army. Some of the most reliable men in the Nawab's army were Hindus.<sup>1</sup> In 1844, when the Bengali *bhadralok* were pleading earnestly for a better share in the administration of British India, through their Bengal British India society, they drew up an impressive list of Hindus employed in high positions during Mughal rule.<sup>2</sup>

The administrative reforms, which culminated in the Cornwallis system, swept away established native agencies such as *ameens*, *quanungoes*, *roy royans*, etc. Undoubtedly, in some branches of administration the Muslims were more adversely affected than the Hindus. Thus the establishment of the Company's army, with Hindu *sepoys*, meant unemployment among the Muslim soldiers.<sup>3</sup> The reforms introduced by Cornwallis in the administration of justice reduced the number of Muslim *vakils* (agents or law officers). In the eighteenth century the majority of the *vakils* were Muslims, but after the introduction of the Cornwallis system only 25 per cent were Muslims<sup>4</sup>. Muslim 'nobility', associated with the Court, lost all power and prestige when Murshidabad was reduced to a district headquarters. Their rather emotional letters, which have survived in the records, pleaded with successive governor generals for small monthly pensions, often as little as Rs. 40, to maintain their large families and servants who stayed behind even after their fall from power.<sup>5</sup>

The Hindus were also adversely affected by the administrative reforms, the great *roy royans*, *naib dewans*, *foujdars*; men

1 Ghulam Hussain, *Sair Mutaqharin*, Vol. 2 pp. 187-91.

2 The Bengal British India Society, *Evidences relative to the efficiency of native agency in the administration of the affairs of this country*. Calcutta, 1844, p. ix. Robert Orme wrote that Aly Verdy Khan 'preferred the service of gentoos in every office and dignity of the state excepting in the ranks of the army'. R. Orme, Vol. 11, p. 53.

3 Ghulam Hussain, *Sair Mutaqharin*.

4 N. K. Sinha, *The economic history of Bengal from Plassey to Permanent Settlement*, Calcutta, 1956 Vol. 2, p. 230.

5 India Office Library (I.O.L.) Mss Eur. F. 109, John Adam papers, Box e. Cf. India Office Records (I.O.R.) Bengal Public Consultations 11 Sept. 1819.



like Alumchand, Manickchand and Mohanlal, who managed the affairs of the state under the patronage of the Nawabs, vanished from the scene. Rammohan Roy describes this loss of political consequence<sup>1</sup> for the Hindus under the British rule.

Table 2<sup>2</sup>

Year	Europeans	Natives	Total
1800	7,719	49,322	57,041
1810	10,715	77,125	87,840
1820	11,676	121,238	132,914
1830	15,701	96,897	112,598
1840	16,393	102,055	118,358
1850	26,803	126,910	153,713
1851	27,159	138,142	165,301

The administrative reforms and the economic changes brought about by new land laws and trade opened up opportunities for men who came from a stratum of traditional society which consisted largely of Hindus. The available statistics show that a large number of Indians were employed by the East India Company's government, the majority in the Revenue and Judicial Departments. Table 2 gives the figures for Indians and Europeans employed in Bengal in the civil administration from 1800 to 1851. It is important to remember that the Indo-Britons (Anglo-Indians) are not classified separately from the Europeans.

Although the number of Indians employed dropped in 1830 from 121,238 to 96,897, the Indians in the Company's service outnumbered the Europeans by about 5 to 1. However this was an army of petty clerks. The handful of Indians who were employed in more responsible posts were also in the Revenue and Judicial Departments. Figures now available for 1851 show that, of 2,910 Indians employed as unconvenanted servants, 2,762 were in Revenue and Judicial Department.<sup>3</sup> Before 1828 there were only two grades of native judges, the *Sudder Ameens* and *Munsiffs*. In 1833 the office of Deputy Collector was created for the Indians. in 1837 that of *Principal Sudder* and in 1843 that of

1 R. Roy, *Petitions against Press Regulations*, in *The English works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (ed. by K. Nag and D. Burman), Calcutta, 1945-9, pt. 4 p. 27.

2 *P.P.H.C.*, 1852-3, (25) XII, p. 373.

3 *P.P.H.C.* 1857-8, XLII (42), p. 153.

Deputy Magistrate. However Indians still received miserable salaries. In 1827 no Indian employed in the Judicial or Revenue Department received more than Rs. 250 per month or £300 a year. The figures given in Table 3 show that out of 2,813 Indians employed in 1849 as unconvenanted servants only 493 received salaries above the £240 grade, while 2,320 were below that grade.

Table 3.<sup>1</sup> *Allowances received by Indians in 1849*

Received by	£ (per annum)
1	1,560
8	840-960
12	720-840
68	600-720
69	480-600
58	360-480
277	240-360
1,173	120-240
1,147	24-120
2,813	

It is clear from these figures that the British administration replaced the Indians, Hindus and Muslims, in all responsible, high-salaried posts and created an administrative machinery which required a large army of clerks and junior administrators in some departments, especially in the Revenue and Judicial Departments. The education and the skill that was required was readily provided by the Hindus. The Muslim population in Bengal consisted largely of officers or 'nobility' (for want of a better term), who were almost invariably non-Bengali, and the Bengali peasantry. Neither of these two classes were interested or had skills for the jobs offered by the Company's government. There was undoubtedly a middle group which consisted of teachers, petty government officers, *vakils* and men in similar professions. This was never very large, not as large as the Hindus in a similar position (with the exception of *vakils*) and played a marginal role in the social and political history of Bengal, unless they happened to be *vakils* at the *Sadr Dewani Adalat* like Maulavi Aminullah.

The statistics of the traditional educational system, imperfect as they are, confirm the view that the majority of the middle group were Hindus. In the province of Bengal (which included

Bihar) the proportion of the Hindu population to the Muslim population was two or less than three to one. But the proportion of the educated Hindus to the educated Muslims was eighteen to one. What is more significant the *kayasthas* dominated the schools where Persian was taught ;<sup>1</sup> Muslim scholars formed a minority in these schools. William Adam noticed that there was no 'account or record of any private institutions for Mahomedan learning either in Calcutta or in the surrounding districts'.<sup>2</sup> According to Ward, in 1818 in Calcutta there were twenty-eight Hindu schools where 173 students received a free education. No rich Muslim community in Calcutta was willing to patronize traditional education nor was there a class eager to receive such education. The traditional educational system had a practical side ; it taught, both at the elementary schools and at the higher centres of learning, rudimentary arithmetic, Persian, book-keeping and the Shastric or Koran law, essential for trade, commerce, managing *zamindaris*, and for the junior posts in the administration. Neither the 'nobility' nor the peasantry had any interest in these professions. The British administrative reforms had helped to create a Hindu middle-income group.

### III

It is not certain how many clerks and junior administrators lived in Calcutta, but it is reasonable to assume that since Calcutta was the centre of British-Indian administration in Bengal a large number of the clerks and some of the junior administrators settled in the city, although a large number of the Indian unconvicted servants appointed by the Revenue and Judicial Department would necessarily be stationed outside.

The coming of the British had also opened up new opportunities in many fields other than administration, not least in trade, commerce and in the ownership and management of land. Here too the Bengali Hindus had an advantage over the Muslims. Their role as brokers, financiers and agents was vital to the British-Indian economy. This was not so much because the

1 *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 2, Oct.-Dec 1844, pp. 19-20.

2 W. Adam, *Reports on the state of education in Bengal*. p. 23.

Hindus had controlled the economy of the country during the Mughal rule ; it has been estimated that nine-tenths of the total land was under their control. All large *zamindars* who paid over 50 per cent of the total land revenue in Bengal were Hindus, and almost all the bankers were also Hindu.<sup>1</sup> The bankers and *zamindars* have also been described as the 'junior anti-feudal ally of the British'.<sup>2</sup> But they were not the real gainers ; the Jagat Setts, the Maharaja of Krishnagar and others who helped the British in 1757 either vanished from the scene or were reduced to insignificance before the end of the eighteenth century. If the British rule brought misery to the Muslim 'nobility' and the high-ranking Hindu officers, the misery was shared by the old *zamindars* and the old bankers.<sup>3</sup> The men who gained most in the New World were small traders, brokers and junior administrators, *pykars*, *dallals*, *gomasthas*, *munshis*, *banyans*, and *dewans*.

From the very beginning it was essential for the Company to have interpreters, brokers and other native agencies to conduct business with Indian producers. The brokers, like the Setts and Basaks, who were weavers by caste and whose traditional occupation was trade in cotton piece-goods, flourished in Calcutta under the Company's rule. The Setts controlled the broker's office in Calcutta until the end of the *dadni* system in 1753. By the beginning of the nineteenth century they had become *shroffs* (money-lenders) in Calcutta<sup>4</sup>. Their descendants helped the cause of the modernists in the 1820s and 1830s by establishing English schools, opening 'reading rooms' in their large houses for the 'educated youths of the metropolis' and acting as 'justices of peace' in the City. They also supplied the holy water for

1 N. K. Sinha, *The economic history of Bengal*, Vol. 2, p. 225. Cf. W. Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer*, 1815, p. 131.

2 B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes : their growth in modern times*, London, 1961, p. 78.

3 W. Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer*, 1815, p. 136.

4 B. Ghosh, 'Some old family founders in eighteenth century Calcutta', *Bengal Past and Present (B.P.P.)*, Vol. 79, 1960, pp. 42-55. For the role of the Indian traders see S. Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the economy of Bengal from 1704-1740*, Calcutta, 1954, pp. 25-7, 218-25.

the idols of Somnath and Dwarkanath and established their family idol *Radhakanta Jew* in Calcutta.<sup>1</sup>

In the eighteenth century the British administration in Bengal, more particularly in Calcutta, was so organized that it had to depend on Indian junior administrators who worked more like speculators or contractors than as civil servants. The contractors-cum-administrators had a better chance of becoming prosperous in the revenue and commercial departments. Akrur Datta, a sloop contractor, Govinda Mitra 'the black collector' of Calcutta, Baranasi Ghosh, *dewan* of the Sheriff of Calcutta, Hidaram Banerjee, *ameen* to the Sheriff of Calcutta, amassed fortunes in this manner. Moreover, the system of 'farming out' (meaning letting out of a fluctuating source of revenue income for a more or less stable annual sum to the highest bidder) which was first used in Calcutta for collecting rents and duties, and later used extensively throughout the whole province, especially during the period between 1772 and 1777, created an unprecedented instability in the economy but allowed a large-scale circulation of money and gave new groups, *banyans* and *gomasthas*, the opportunity to control land and land-rent, thus replacing the 'ancient families'. Significantly, the 'new landed aristocracy' came into existence in areas where the British used their method of farming out first in Calcutta, The Twenty Four Parganas and Burdwan.<sup>2</sup>

However, it was in the private sector of the English trade in Asia that the Indian middlemen flourished. In the eighteenth century the trade between Asia and England was so organized that co-operation between the Company and various forms of private enterprise was essential for its development. While the Company clung to its monopoly of trade between Asia and Europe, it allowed private Englishmen, 'free merchants' and company servants to enjoy a large share in 'the Country Trade', trade in the Indian Ocean between Asian countries. The Indian financiers played a vital role in the private sector ; they provided the capital which could not be raised in the absence of a modern

1 L. N. Ghose, *The modern history of the Indian Chiefs, Rajas, Zamindars etc.*, Calcutta, 1879-81, Vol. 2, pp. 155-7.

2 N. K. Sinha, *The economic history of Bengal*. pp. 68-95, 31.

joint stock banking system. The Indians also invested large sums in Calcutta, where there was a boom in building, especially during the 1760s and 1770s. Recently, Marshall has pointed out that case after case argued before the Calcutta Mayor's Court shows 'that Europeans traded on the capital of their *banyans* or Indian agents; or to be more exact the *banyans* traded on their masters' names and authority'.<sup>1</sup> Men like Nubkissen, Madan Datta, Dattaram Ghose, and later Ramdoolal Dey, invested money in this manner and amassed vast fortunes. Lack of capital, lack of knowledge of local products and restrictions imposed on the free application of European skill and capital especially in the *mofussil* areas made it necessary to work through the Indian agencies. It appears that the Indian commercial class did very well from trade. As early as 1802 their significance was noted by an English observer. 'The formerly timid Hindu now lends money at respondentia in distant voyages, engages in speculations to various parts of the world and works as an underwriter in the different insurance offices, erects indigo works in various parts of Bengal and is just as well acquainted with the principles of British laws respecting commerce as the generality of European merchants.'<sup>2</sup>

This commercial class had also invested large sums in land. The transfer of land from the 'ancient families' to the new groups continued throughout the eighteenth century, even after the Permanent Settlement. Darpanarayan Tagore, who acquired a large fortune working as a *dewan* of the French Company in Chandernagore, settled in Calcutta some time during the latter half of the eighteenth century and purchased a big *zamindari* in north Bengal which originally belonged to the 'ancient family' of Rajsahi.<sup>3</sup> After the Permanent Settlement the security of investment attracted Calcutta Hindu merchants like Dwarkanath Tagore and Motilal Seal to land. A large number of estates changed hands during the years immediately following the

1 P. J. Marshall, 'Private British investment in eighteenth century Bengal', *B.P.P.* Diamond Jubilee number, 1967, p. 55.

2 *The Reporter of Internal Commerce of Bengal*, as quoted in N. K. Sinha, 'Indian business enterprise, its failure in Calcutta' (1800—1848), *B.P.P.* 1967, p. 115.

3 L. N. Ghose, *The modern history of the Indian Chiefs...* Vol. 2, pp. 160—2.

Permanent Settlement, when the government confiscated many *zamindaris* for revenue arrears and put them up to auction.<sup>1</sup>

There is evidence to show that a large number of Indians, rich and poor, moved into Calcutta during the period between 1742 and 1756.<sup>2</sup> But the vast majority of the Indians settled down in Calcutta during the 1860s and 1870s, when Calcutta was being transformed from a small European settlement into a prosperous commercial city. The opulent merchants and bankers were the first group of Indians to settle down in the city. They built large houses, established family deities, patronized Brahmins and *ghataks* (match-makers), entertained European officers and friends as a Mughal courtier would do, imitated the Europeans in architecture, furniture and, in the nineteenth century, in the consumption of tea, wine and soda water.<sup>3</sup> These were the Bengali *abhijat* (aristocratic) families. Debs, Tagores, Deys, Ghoses, Mallicks, whose descendants claimed leadership in Calcutta society during the nineteenth century. They were the first urbanized social group in Bengal, who transformed their Calcutta *basas* (temporary residences) into *baris* (permanent homes) in the eighteenth century, long before any other social group.<sup>4</sup>

Table 4 gives us a list of leading men in Calcutta, who were

- 1 For an account of the ruin of the 'old landed families' see W. W. Hunter, *Annals of rural Bengal* (reprint), Calcutta (n.d.), pp. 56–8.
- 2 Raja Binaya Krishna Deb, *The early history and growth of Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1905, p. 60.
- 3 W. Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer* (2nd ed.), London, 1828 Vol. 1, p. 324, as quoted in A. F. S. Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal 1818–1835*, p. 13. European clothes became fashionable among the young undergraduates in the forties. Ralph Smyth, Bengal Artillery Revenue Surveyor, observed in 1851, 'a late introduction of pantaloons, stockings and patent leather shoes, in an attempt to Europeanize themselves, is to be seen amongst the young Bengalis in Calcutta, but it is unsuited to them, their own peculiar costume always obtains respect, which the innovation seldom does.' R. Smyth, *Statistical and geographical report of the 24 Pergunnahs district*, Calcutta, 1851, p. 17.
- 4 This process of urbanization was slow to start among other classes, who even in the twentieth century used their Calcutta residences (*basas*) as temporary living quarters, while their real homes (*baris*) were in the villages where all the important family functions like *sradh*s, marriages and *pujas* took place. See P. Sinha, *Nineteenth century Bengal : Aspects of social history*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 124–7.

prominent in public affairs in the city during the period between 1815 and 1838. The table gives the caste, name and occupation of the 'family founder' (*paribar pratisthata*) and the area of Calcutta where the family house was situated. These were the established Calcutta *abhijats*, who considered themselves as 'natural leaders' of men,<sup>1</sup> and who according to Bishop Heber lived in 'very large, very fine, generally very dirty houses of Grecian architecture' built amidst the dingy bleak part of the black town<sup>2</sup> They were the top group (*prathamadhara*) in Bhavanicharan Banerjee's list of *bhadralok*, who moved in large carriages and wore fine clothes, and were described as *dewans* and *mucchudis*.<sup>3</sup> The list is based on 'The accounts of all respectable and opulent natives of the Presidency', originally made by Radhakanta Deb for H.T. Prinsep in 1822, and on another list made in 1839.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that Rammohun Roy was not included in the list. No doubt this was partly due to Deb's hostility towards the reformer, but I think largely because Rammohun was relatively a newcomer to Calcutta and he had yet to establish himself among the Calcutta *abhijats* (although Rammohun had business connexions with the city from the end of the eighteenth century, he did not settle down there until 1815). It is equally significant to note that Deb did not think it was necessary to include any Muslim family. It seems that there was no Muslim family in Calcutta rich enough and strong enough to be involved in public affairs.

This list is not complete ; it excludes Rammohun Roy and fails to mention many other prominent men like Baidyanath Mukherjee, Motilal Seal, Ramkamal Sen, Hidaram Banerjee's family, Biswnath Motilal, Bhavanicharan Banerjee, Brindaban

1 *Dwijendranath Thakurer Smritikatha (Memoirs of Dwijendranath Tagore)*, as published in B. B. Gupta, *Puratan Prasanga*, Vidyabharati edition, Calcutta, 1373 (Bengali era), pp. 284-6.

2 R. Heber, *Narrative of a journey through the upper provinces of India*, London, 1828, Vol. 3, p. 238.

3 Bhavanicharan Banerjee, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, Calcutta, 1823, as reprinted in 1343, pp. 8-9.

4 Radhakanta Deb to W. H. MacNaughton, 9 Nov. 1835. Bengal Public Consultations, 25 Nov. 1835, as reprinted in B. N. Banerjee, 'Raja Radhakanta Deb's service to the country', *Indian Historical Records Commission (I.H.R.C.)*, Vol. 9 (1926), pp. 105-9.



Table 4<sup>1</sup>

Name	Caste	Area	Family History
1 Babu Jagannath Prasad and Babu Kashi Prasad	<i>Kayastha</i>	Shyambazar	Descendants of Maharaja Durlabhran ; were related by marriage to Raja Rajballabh. Durlabhran and Rajballabh were revenue administrators during the Mughal rule and helped the British in 1757
2 Maharaja Rajkrishna Deb	<i>Maulik Kayastha</i>	Sobhabazar	Son of Raja Nubkissen Deb, <i>dewan</i> of Clive and Persian <i>Munshi</i> to the Company
3 Raja Gopimohun Deb	<i>Maulik Kayastha</i>	Sobhabazar	Gopimohun was adopted son and nephew of Nubkissen
4 Raja Ramchandra Roy	<i>Subarnavanik</i>	Pathuriaghata	Son of Raja Sukhamoy Roy, <i>dewan</i> of Sir Elijah Impey. Sukamoy's grandfather served as <i>banyan</i> of Clive and other Governors of Bengal
5 Gaurcharan and Nimaicharan Mallick	<i>Subarnavanik</i>	Jorasako and Burrabazar	Bankers and businessmen, long established in Calcutta
6 Babu Srinarayan Singha	<i>Kayastha</i>	Jorasako (?)	Descendants of Dewan Ganga Govind Singha, <i>dewan</i> of the Board of Revenue during the time of Warren Hastings
7 Kali Sankar Ghoshal	<i>Radi Kulin Brahmin</i>	Khidirpur	Descendants of Gokulchandra Ghoshal, <i>dewan</i> of Verelest
8 Rajnarayan Roy and Taraknath Roy	<i>Kayastha</i>	Andul (outside Calcutta)	Descendants of Ram Charan Roy, <i>dewan</i> of Vansittart and General Smith
9 The Tagores	<i>Pirali Brahmin (Bhagna Kulin)</i>	Pathuriaghata, Jorasako and Mechuabazar	Descendants of Darpanarayan, who worked as <i>dewan</i> of the French Company
10 Gourcharan Sett and his kinsmen	Weaver	Burrabazar	<i>Shroffs</i> of Calcutta, established since the beginning of the eighteenth century
11 Radhakrishna Basak	Weaver	Pathuriaghata	He was born in the family of <i>shroffs</i> who were related by marriage with the Setts of Burrabazar. Radhakrishna was a <i>dewan</i> in the Sub-Treasurer's Office

12	Ramdoolal Dey	<i>Kayastha</i>	Simla	A shipping magnate started his career as a <i>sarkar</i> (bill collector) at the very low salary of Rs. 5 per month
13	Prankrishna and Jagomohun Biswas	<i>Kayastha</i>	Barrackpore	Ramhari Biswas, father of Prankrishna and Jagomohun, made money as <i>dewan</i> of the salt agent at Chittagang
14	Rajkrishna Singh and Sibkrishna Singh	<i>Kayastha</i>	Jorasako	Descendants of Santiram Singh, <i>dewan</i> of Sir Thomas Ramsbold and Middleton of Patna
15	Bhagabaticharan Mitra and Bhavanicharan Mitra	<i>Kulin Kayastha</i>	Bagbazar	Descendants of Govindaram Mitra, <i>dewan</i> of the <i>zamindari</i> office in Calcutta ('The black Collector of Calcutta')
16	Nabakrishna Mitra	<i>Kulin Kayastha</i>	Bagbazar	Descendants of Gokulchandra Mitra, who made money working as a contractor
17	Ganganarayan Sarkar	<i>Kayastha</i> (?)	Garanhata	He was a <i>dewan</i> of Palmer and Co
18	Premchandra, Ratanchandra and Umeshchandra Palchaudhuri	<i>Tili</i>	?	Krishnachandra Palchaudhuri, father of Premchandra and his brother made money working as <i>dewan</i> to the salt agent in Calcutta
19	Rajnarayan and Rupnarayan Sen	<i>Subarnavanik</i>	Jorbagan	Mothuramohun Sen, father of Rajnarayan and Rupnarayan, was a <i>shroff</i> of Calcutta
20	Radhamadhab and Gauricharan Banerjee	<i>Radi Kulin Brahmin</i>	Jorbagan	Descendants of Ramsundar Banerjee, who married into the wealthy family of Rajnarayan Misra and worked as <i>dewan</i> of the opium agent at Patna
21	Shibnarayan Ghosh	<i>Kulin Kayastha</i>	Pathuriaghata	Ram Gopal Ghosh, father of Shibnarayan, was a <i>sarkar</i> of Warren Hastings
22	Nilmani Mallick	<i>Subarnavanik</i>	Pathuriaghata	Descendant of Ramkrishna Mallick, a businessman
23	Rasiklal and Haralal Datta	<i>Kayastha</i>	Nimtala	Descendants of Madanmohun Datta, the shipping magnate of Calcutta

<sup>1</sup> 'Principal Hindu inhabitants of Calcutta', Foreign Dept. Misc. Records 1839, Vol. 131, pp. 316-36. as printed in B. N. Banerjee, *Sangbadapatre Sekaler Katha* (S S.K.) (3rd ed.), Calcutta, 1356, B.E. Vol. 2, pp. 753-56.

Mitra, and Kalinath Munshi. In fact, in 1839 another list of 'eminent natives' was made to bring Deb's list up to date.<sup>1</sup> In the 1839 list Calcutta was divided into twenty wards (*pallis*) and the names of leading men in each ward were given separately. This list is fuller than Deb's list of 1822, for it gives most names which figure prominently in contemporary newspapers and other documents and mentions various branches of the Tagore and Mallick families separately. But the new list still excludes Rammohun Roy's family and the short family histories mentioned in Deb's list are missing. However, when we read these two lists together we get a shrewd idea about the origin and nature of the Calcutta *abhijat bhadralok* group, which confirms the points I have raised before. The nineteenth-century *abhijat bhadralok* were new men : not only did they move into the city during the second half of the eighteenth century, they rose to high social status in one or two generations. They were of humble origin, small traders, junior administrators and small landholders, who made money working as junior partners (*banyan* or *dewan*) of the English officers and free merchants.

No doubt some of them had already established themselves during the Mughal rule in Bengal, like the families of Rammohun Roy and Brindaban Mitra. Pitambar Mitra, father of Brindaban, was a *vakil* of the Nawab *vizier* of Oudh at the Court of Delhi. But there were many who rose from poverty to wealth. The great shipping magnate, Ramdoolal Dey, is a good example of this kind of vertical mobility. He was an orphan, who began his career as a *sarkar* (bill collector) at the very low salary of Rs. 5 a month at Madan Datta's office in Calcutta. With careful investment and good luck he became a millionaire in the nineteenth century. With the growth of 'consignment trade' and agency houses he got himself attached as *banyan* agent to Fairlie Fergusson and Company. But he also worked as an independent agent. Foreign traders, especially the Americans, found it more profitable to do business with Dey than with one of the established English houses since he charged them a com-

1 S.S.K. (3rd. ed.) Vol. 2, pp. 157-8. I have not yet succeeded in locating the original copy of Deb's list which is now incorporated in the 1839 list (Sept. 1969).

mission of not more than 1 per cent.<sup>1</sup> He established contacts with the merchants in New York, Boston, Newberry Port, and Philadelphia. His American business friends named a ship after him and sent him a portrait of George Washington as a token of friendship. His name figures prominently in the shipping list of Calcutta port for the years 1817, 1820 and 1824.<sup>2</sup>

Motilal Seal is another example of this kind of vertical mobility. He was born in Calcutta of a small cloth merchant family. Seal started his career selling empty bottles and corks ; by 1820 established himself as a leading merchant, working as *banyan* to various agency houses, investing in indigo plantations, in flour mills, and purchasing *zamindaris*.<sup>3</sup> In the 1830s, after 'the agency house crisis', he started working as 'general merchants and agents' in partnership with Europeans and opened Oswald and Seal and Company.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the administrative and economic changes created a new subservient capitalist class in Calcutta. They remained interested in commerce and trade throughout 1815 to 1838, even after they purchased large *zamindaris* and settled down in Calcutta. They flourished because they were still an important link in the British-Indian economic system. Of the 202 proprietors of the Union Bank in 1835, seventy-three were Indians. Of the seventy-three Indian proprietors, seventy were Bengali Hindus, two were Muslims and one was Parsi. There were four Indian directors of the Bank ; of them, three were Bengali Hindus, Ashutosh Dey, son of Ramdoolal Dey, Radhamadhab Banerjee and Dwarkanath Tagore.<sup>5</sup>

This class was predominantly Hindu. No doubt there were

1 Mins. of Ev. 11, sec. com. H.C. 1831-2 (735. 11), p. 151. Cf. Grish Chunder Ghose, *A lecture on the life of Ramdoolal Dey, The Bengali Milionaire*, Belloore, 1868, p. 20.

2 *The Bengal Almanac and Annual Directory for 1818*, Calcutta, 1818, pp. 153-5, and *The new annual Bengal Directory and general Register for 1820 and 1824* (India Office Library reference ST. 1216). There were two other Bengalis whose names appear in the shipping lists, Davy Persad Ghose and Rajkissen Dutt.

3 *Mutylal Seal, being a lecture delivered by K. C. Mitra*, Calcutta, 1869, pp. 6-16.

4 N. K. Sinha, *B.P.P.* 1967, p. 118.

5 *Bengal Directory*, 1858, Commercial.

many rich Muslim merchants, like Shaik Abdullah and Shaik Gulam Hosein, whose names appear in the shipping lists for 1815, 1817, 1820 and 1824, who donated regularly to the School Society and School Book Society and who signed various petitions.<sup>1</sup> But they were so-called 'Mughal merchants', a marginal social group, isolated from the vast majority of the Bengali Muslim masses and from the other non-Bengali Muslim groups in Calcutta. The Muslims failed to produce an administrative or commercial middle class, not because they were, as a group, averse to English education, nor because they were dispossessed as a community by the new administration (it only dispossessed a section of that community), nor because the British deliberately discouraged the introduction of English education amongst them,<sup>2</sup> but because the vast majority of Muslims had neither the inclination nor the skill required for the type of administrative posts open to the Indians, nor for the areas of economic activity which received a new impetus under the British and opened up opportunities for men to move up in the new world. As early as 1815, Walter Hamilton observed: 'The men of opulence now in Bengal are Hindu merchants, bankers, and *banyans* of Calcutta, with a few at the principal provincial stations. The greatest men formerly were the Mahomedan rulers whom the British have superseded and the Hindu zamindars. These two classes are now reduced to poverty and the lower classes look up to the official servants and domestics of the English gentlemen.'<sup>3</sup>

Below this *abhijat bhadralok* were the large shopkeepers, small traders, small landholders and white-collar workers in commercial houses and government offices, teachers, 'native doctors', journalists and writers. These people formed the bulk of the middle group (*madhyabit*) in Bhavanicharan Banerjee's list.

1 *The Bengal Almanac and Annual Directory*, 1815 and 1818, and *The New Annual Bengal Directory*, 1820 and 1824.

2 Recently Professor Mallick has argued that the slow growth of English education among the Muslims can be attributed to the British Government's failure to introduce English education in the Calcutta Madrasa and other Muslim educational institutions. A. R. Mallick, *British policy and the Muslims in Bengal 1757-1858*, Dacca, 1961, pp. 166-93.

3 W. Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer*, 1828, p. 136.

'They were not rich but comfortable (*dhanadya nahen keval annajoge achen*)<sup>1</sup> and followed the leadership of the rich and imitated their life-style. Dwijendranath Tagore described them as *grihasthas* (householders), who formed the lower order of the *bhadralok* group and had accepted the leadership of the *abhijats*.<sup>2</sup> There are no reliable statistics to show how many people belonged to this middle income group. However, as we have already noticed the government appointed a large number of clerks, and since Calcutta was also growing as a commercial city, it is reasonable to suppose that the commercial houses provided a great deal of employment for clerks. We do not have the figures of the number of teachers employed in the city, but, if Adam's *Reports* are to be believed, then the number of teachers must have substantially increased during the period 1817 to 1838, when the schools, elementary and higher, multiplied so fast that Adam could not include them all in his list.<sup>3</sup> We do not know how many Indian doctors were practising in Calcutta, but we do know that, in 1822 when the School for Native Doctors was opened, twenty attended the institution, and by 1826 fifty had gone through the School.<sup>4</sup>

However, we know that the Indians found the press a useful and profitable profession. Although not all Calcutta newspapers were as rich as the *Bengal Hurkaru* (who paid Rs. 800 to its editor, employed seventy people as sub-editors and reporters and had a library and a reading room with gaslight for the use of the public),<sup>5</sup> many men like Nilratan Halder, editor of *Bangadoot*, Bhavanicharan Banerjee, editor of *Samachar Chandrika*, made a living as editors of newspapers and periodicals and authors of books and pamphlets. There were others like Ganga Kishore Bhattacharjee, the editor of the *Bengal Gazetteer*, who 'conceived the idea of printing works in the

1 Bhavanicharan Banerjee, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, pp. 8–9.

2 Dwijendranath Thakurer *Smritikatha*, p. 185.

3 W. Adam, *Reports on the state of education in Bengal*, pp. 9, 15–16, 46–9.

4 *Samachar Darpan*, 6 July 1822, S.S.K. (2nd ed.), Calcutta 1344 (Bengali era), Vol. 1, pp. 35–6.

5 'Present state of the Indian Press', *Alexander's East India Magazine and Colonial and Commercial Journal*, London, Vol. 1 Dec. 1830 to June 1831, p. 48.

current language as a means of acquiring wealth'.<sup>1</sup> He had his own newspapers and his own press, and wrote and published a number of books. Then there was Babooram, who had similar ideas and worked as H. T. Colebrook's pandit ; he later took to printing and publishing and was said to have amassed a fortune of Rupees 1 lakh before he retired in Benaras.<sup>2</sup> It was estimated that some 15,000 Bengali books were sold in Calcutta in ten years between 1811 and 1821. The majority of the books were on Hindu mythology, erotic art and law, some with plates engraved by Harihar Banerjee, whose gods and goddesses were, according to the missionaries, 'stiff and uncouth' but 'tolerably accurate' and 'not discreditable for neatness'.<sup>3</sup>

There were many others employed in the press, or hired by the rich as legal agents, or *munshis*, or *gomasthas* (secretaries or managers). These people often lived on the ground floors of the large houses in Calcutta.<sup>4</sup>

#### IV

Throughout this essay I have referred to the *bhadralok* as a social class. Although it is now fashionable in the academic world<sup>5</sup> to discard the concept of class altogether I still find it a valuable intellectual tool in analysing the social and political development of modern India. Recently the *bhadralok* has been described as a 'status group', not a 'class'. It seems to me that to describe the *bhadralok* as a 'status group' or alternatively a 'mere category' is to ignore the economic changes and the social mobility in Bengal in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

A class can be described as a social group which holds a common position along some continuum of the economy. This

1 *The Friend of India* (Quarterly series) (2nd ed.), Serampore, 1822, Vol. 1. pp. 134–5.

2 *Op. cit.* p. 134.

3 *Op. cit.* pp. 137–8.

4 Finch, *T.S.S.L.* Vol. 13, p. 173.

5 P. H. M. van den Dungen, 'Changes in status and occupation in nineteenth century Punjab', in D.A. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, London, 1968, p. 85.

6 J. H. Broomfield, 'The Non-cooperation decision of 1920 : a crisis in Bengal politics', in D. A. Low, *op. cit.*, pp. 231–6, 245–7 and 255–6. At the seminar during the discussion on this paper Mr. R. Guha, of the University of Sussex, called the *bhadralok* 'a mere category not a class'.

continuum need not necessarily be of income or occupation. The position of a class should be understood, as Marx had suggested, in terms of its position in the process of production. Thus in a modern capitalist system there are two important classes, the capitalist, the owners of the means of production, and the proletariat, the producers who sell their labour to the capitalist class. But these are broad categories which helped Marx to ascertain the large groupings characteristic of a developed capitalist system.<sup>1</sup> On this point Weber agrees with Marx ; to Weber property and the lack of property were 'the basic categories of all class situations'.<sup>2</sup> But within these broad categories, class situations are further differentiated, according to, as Weber put it, 'the kind of property that is usable for returns' and according to 'the kind of services that can be offered in the market'.<sup>3</sup> Marx himself recognized the existence of many social classes which played important roles in history. In describing the political situation in France in 1848, Marx distinguished between the finance aristocracy, industrial bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, proletariat, peasantry and lumpenproletariat.<sup>4</sup> The Marxist concept of class is inclusive : it assimilated economic power, market chances, occupational prestige and style of life into class. Weber on the other hand, wanted to distinguish 'the class situation' (determined by market chances) from 'the status situation' (determined by 'a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honor').<sup>5</sup> Moreover, to the Marxists, class is always a category for the purpose of the analysis of social conflicts.

In other words a social class is not formed just because a group of people hold a common position in a particular sector of the economy and enjoy a similar life-style but because its members are conscious of their existence as a group and are organized in opposition to other groups. As Marx said 'In so far

1 Karl Marx, *Capital* III, as quoted in T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in sociology and social philosophy*. London (Pelican), 1965, p. 186.

2 Max Weber, *From Max Weber — essays in sociology* (ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills), London, 1947, p. 182. 3 *Ibid.*

4 Karl Marx, *The class struggles in France 1848 to 1850 in Selected Works*, Moscow, 1950, Vol. 1, pp. 128—31.

5 Max Weber, *op. cit.* p. 187.



as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class'.<sup>1</sup> Weber played down the importance of conflict in 'class situations'; he put an undue emphasis on 'communal actions', meaning not actions between members of the same class but actions between members of different classes.<sup>2</sup>

The term 'class' is used here to describe a *de facto* social group, which holds a common position along some continuum of the economy, enjoys a common style of life and is conscious of its existence as a class organized to further its ends. In contrast to caste society, a class society is an open system, in theory, and, to some extent, in practice. We find that in a modern society, based on a money economy, the distinction between 'class situations' and 'status situations' is more theoretical than real. More often than not the rich enjoy high status in society. Thus 'honor', as Weber himself said, 'can be knit to a class situation'; the style of life and consumption of goods are linked with the acquisition of goods.

In Calcutta, in the nineteenth century, class was one dimension of social stratification which determined social relationships in the city. If we use Marxian class analysis then Indian society in Calcutta was divided into two classes. There was the *abhijat bhadralok*, the big *zamindars*, merchants and top administrators, who were the owners of land and capital (although as a capitalist class they were subservient to the British). Then there were the dockers, the builders, the workers, the domestics, the palan-kin bearers and other wage-earners—a large migrant labour force, some of whom came from Orissa and the Up Country, formed the class of producers. The relationship between these two classes was contractual and economic, and was not determined by caste or custom.

Between these two groups there was already growing, as we have noticed, a middle class, the *grihastha bhadralok*, whom in

1 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 303.

2 Max Weber, *From Max Weber—essays in sociology*, p. 185.

1829 the *Bangadoot* referred to as *maddhyabitto sreni*.<sup>1</sup> The shopkeepers, small *zamindars*, small merchants and white-collar workers belonged to this group. However, this had not yet crystallized into a homogeneous social class. They accepted the leadership of the *abhijat* and imitated their life-style. They were dubbed together with the *abhijat* by the English officers as 'the educated natives' to distinguish them as a group from the old 'nobility' and the masses.<sup>2</sup> The line of demarcation between the *abhijat* and the *grihastha* is not very clear; after all, the rich *bhadralok* emerged from a new 'middle class', who were considered as 'upstarts' by many.<sup>3</sup> Although the *abhijats* were rich, enjoyed high status, and exercised considerable power in Calcutta, their subservience to the British and their imitation of the life-style of the colonial elite and the Mughal courtiers made all *bhadralok*, rich and of the middle-income group, in this sense, part of a 'new middle class'.

The class situation in Calcutta can be compared and contrasted with the class situation in England in the early nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution brought about profound social and economic changes; the steam engine broke the eighteenth-century pyramidal structure of English society. England witnessed not only what Engels called the disintegration of society into individuals but also the carving-out of classes.<sup>4</sup> Before the rise of a politically conscious working-class movement, a class struggle was waged by the middle class against 'aristocratic tyranny' and 'hereditary opulence'. In contrast, in Calcutta, there was no Industrial Revolution, no large-scale introduction of the steam engine to break down the old social structure completely. Yet the market in land, trade and commerce brought about a significant social change, and Bengal witnessed the rise of a new middle class. This class was less aggressive and less homogeneous than its English counterpart but it was equally articulate in politics.

1 *Bangadoot*, 13 June 1829, as reprinted in *S.S.K.*, Vol. 1, p. 398.

2 H. T. Prinsep, *Three generations in India 1770–1904*, I.O.L. MSS. Eur. C97/1, 1 and 3.

3 'Mookerjee's Magazine' as quoted in N. N. Ghose, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*, p. 171.

4 Asa Briggs, 'The language of "class" in early nineteenth-century England', in Briggs and J. Saville, *Essays in labour history. In memory of G. D. H. Cole*, London, 1960, pp. 43–78.

There was in fact in Bengal no conflict between trade and the land, nor between the 'old *zamindars*' and the 'new *zamindars*'. No doubt many old *zamindaris* were bought off by the *abhijat bhadralok*, and there was some resentment against the *nouveaux riches* amongst the 'old aristocracy', but there was no class struggle between the *bhadralok* and the 'old aristocracy'. The tension between the family of Nubkissen and that of the Maharaja of Krishnagar, over the family idol, was a family feud not a class struggle.<sup>1</sup> In fact the 'ancient families' were respected by the *bhadralok*. It was Radhakanta Deb, grandson of Nubkissen, who in 1838 proposed that the Maharaja of Krishnagar should be asked to be the President of the *Zamindar Sabha*, since he came from the 'most ancient lineage' in Bengal.<sup>2</sup> In some areas the 'ancient families' still exercised considerable influence. If Ram Ram Bose is to be believed, the descendants of Raja Basanta Roy (uncle of Pratapaditya Roy, one of the Bengali chieftains who fought the Mughals in the seventeenth century) were still respected in Jessore, and were leaders (*Goshtipati*) of *Bangaja Kayasthas* in that district.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly the *bhadralok* had a deep respect for the Mughal nobility. In 1842 Radhakanta Deb went to pay his homage to the Nawab Nazim of Murshidabad on his way to Gaya.<sup>4</sup> Ram-mohun Roy proclaimed his allegiance to the family of Babar and accepted the title of Raja conferred upon him by Akbar II.

However there was some hostility towards the lower orders, the dockers, palankin bearers and other wage-earners in Calcutta, and the tenants and the landless labourers in the rural area. The *bhadralok* attempted to resist the wage demands of the palankin bearers by various means, fair and foul, and complained in their newspapers that money was being drained out of Bengal by the Oriya palankin bearers.<sup>5</sup> Dwarkanath Tagore, 'a Hindoo of an

1 N. N. Ghose, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*, p. 190.

2 The Landholders' Society. *Rules and Regulations and Proceedings of the meetings held in B. S. 1244 and 1245*, Calcutta 1838, p. 12. (I.O.L. ref. ver. Tract no. 1900.)

3 Ram Ram Bose, *Raja Pratapaditya Charit*, Serampore, 1801, p. 156.

4 *A rapid sketch of the life of Raja Radhakanta Deva Bahadur with some notices of his ancestors and testimonials of his character and learning*, Calcutta, 1859, p. 22.

5 *Samachar Darpan* 21 August 1819, and 2 June 1827, S.S.K. (2nd ed.), Vol. 1, pp. 171, 344-5.

enlarged mind, and a truly British spirit', as he was known to his English friends, did not hesitate in bullying a corrupt magistrate to break up an *ekjoti* (rent-strike) amongst his tenants.<sup>1</sup> Many were afraid that the spread of English education among the lower classes would hurt the interests of the *bhadralok*; they would demand higher wages, equality and even the jobs so dearly held by the *bhadralok*. *Samachar Chandrika* claimed that the demand for higher wages and the lack of washermen in Calcutta were due to the spread of education among the lower classes.<sup>2</sup> Thus, although there was no sharp class struggle of the type England had witnessed under the impact of the Industrial Revolution, and the interrelationship between classes was not one of continuous conflict, many social conflicts and collective activities can only be understood in terms of class. Not all social relationships in Calcutta were determined by class; society as a whole was not just separated, as some of the missionaries thought, into two 'classes, the borrower and the usurer, the industrious though exhausted poor, and the fat and flourishing money-lender'.<sup>3</sup> The people were also separated into communities and castes. Nevertheless, the importance of class as one dimension of social stratification in Calcutta cannot be denied.

The caste structure in Bengal during the pre-colonial period was less rigid than it is supposed to have been in other parts of India. The Bengali Brahmins, though enjoying a very high ritual status, never had that exclusive high social and economic status which the Brahmins in South India had enjoyed in the past.<sup>4</sup> The Brahmins had to share the economic and social power with other castes. Traditionally, the Hindu community in Bengal was divided into two *varnas*, Brahmin and Shudra. The Shudras were further subdivided into three groups: clean, unclean and untouchable. All *jatis* in Bengal were fitted into these four broad

1 R. M. Martin, *Statistics of the Colonies of the British Empire*...p. 289, Cf. K. C. Mitra, *Memoir of Dwarkanath Tagore*, Calcutta, 1870, pp. 16-19.

2 *Samachar Chandrika*, 12 May 1830, pp. 144-5.

3 *The Friend of India*, Vol. 1, p. 90.

4 André Bételle, *Caste, Class and Power*, Berkeley, 1965, pp. 3-10 and 191-2.

categories, Brahmins, clean Shudras, unclean Shudras and untouchables ; there were at least forty-one *jatis* in Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

Two caste groups, *Kayastha* and *Baidya*, enjoyed a very high social and political status along with the Brahmin, although their ritual status was rather low. They had the monopoly of the educational system, and held important administrative posts ; being landowners they controlled the agrarian economy. According to Abu-ul-Fazl, the majority of the Bengali *zamindars* in the sixteenth century were *Kayasthas*.<sup>2</sup> By the eighteenth century large *zamindars* were almost invariably Brahmins. According to Hamilton a large number of the Brahmins were also employed as 'managers' of *zamindaris* belonging to other castes. They could obtain land leases on better terms and were exempted from 'various impositions and extortions to which the inferior classes are exposed'.<sup>3</sup> Thus in some parts of Bengal, in the eighteenth century, the Brahmins exercised considerable influence by combining their high ritual status with political and economic power. However, the *Baidyas* and *Kayasthas* were equally important, the majority of the administrative posts were held by them, many small *zamindaris* were under their control, and, while the *Kayastha* monopolized the vernacular educational system, the *Baidyas* shared the knowledge of Sanskrit with the Brahmins.<sup>4</sup> It would seem that the Brahmin, *Baidya*, and *Kayastha* together formed a sub-elite group in the power structure of the traditional society ; all rulers of Bengal, the Palas, Senas, Pathans, and Mughals had to rely on their support.

Despite the social upheaval, the Brahmins, *Kayasthas* and *Baidyas* continued to exercise considerable power in Calcutta. At least twelve out of the twenty-three families mentioned in Table 4 were *Kayasthas*, and three were Brahmins. L. N. Ghose,

1 For a stimulating discussion on the caste structure in medieval Bengal see N. Ray, *Bangalir Itihas, Adi parva*, Calcutta, 1359, pp. 257–323. Cf. W. Ward, *A view of the history, literature and mythology of the Hindoos*, London, 1817–20, Vol. 3, pp. 94–143.

2 Abul Fzal-i-Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. 2 (trans. H. S. Jarrett, Sir Jadunath Sarkar), Calcutta, 1949, p. 147.

3 W. Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer*, 1828, p. 135.

4 Sir William Jones was taught Sanskrit by a *Baidya* teacher ; see S. N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones*, p. 195.

writing during the second half of the century, gave a list of sixty eminent families of Calcutta, thirty-four of which were *Kayasthas*, eleven were Brahmins and one was *Baidya*.<sup>1</sup> Educational records of Bengal of this period also show that the majority of men who went for higher education came from these three castes. This factor has led many scholars, old and new, to believe that the *bhadralok* was a traditional elite, consisting of Brahmin, *Baidya* and *Kayastha*, which continued to enjoy high status and exercise power as junior administrators and landowners throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> However this view fails to recognize that, in contrast to caste, the *bhadralok* was an open *de facto* social group. Although the *bhadralok* was almost exclusively a Hindu group, caste had no part in the selection; men who held a similar economic position, enjoyed a similar style of living and received a similar education were considered as *bhadralok*. Men like Motilal Seal, a *Subarnavanik* (unclean Shudra), and Gaurchand Basak, a Weaver, although of very low ritual status, were leading *bhadralok* of Calcutta. In Table 4 we have the names of families belonging to such castes, *Subarnavanik* and Weaver. Even L. N. Ghose included six *Subarnavaniks*, one Weaver, one Brazier, one *Sadgop*, one *Tili*, and one *Kaibartya* (not to mention the *Pārsee*, *Khetri* and Muslim families) in his list of eminent men of Calcutta. The lives of the Bengali *abhijat bhadralok* proved, as the nineteenth-century biographer of Ramdoolal Dey put it, that 'there is an aristocracy which is not born but may be made'.<sup>3</sup> Those who could acquire enough wealth, English education, and high status through administrative service, belonged to this 'new aristocracy', and since a large number of Brahmins, *Baidyas* and *Kayasthas* had administrative skill, and economic incentives, they formed the bulk of the *bhadralok*. The majority of the Brahmins and *Kayasthas*, poor and illiterate, were not considered as *bhadralok*. According to Ward three-quarters of the total

1 L. N. Ghose, *The modern history of the Indian Chiefs*...Vol. 2.

2 D. A. Low, *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, pp. 6 and 331, Cf. A. Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 36–57.

3 Grish Chunder Ghose, *A lecture on the life of Ramdoolal Dey*, p. 62.

number of Brahmins in Calcutta and the Twenty-Four Parganas, were domestics.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the Brahminical laws, a caste in Bengal, at least since the eighteenth century, was not a hereditary occupational group. In 1795, Colebrook noticed that every profession, with few exceptions, was open to 'every description of persons'. 'Brahmins are often employed in the most servile office and the Sudras often elevated to situations of respectability and importance.'<sup>2</sup> In 1815 Hamilton confirmed this view : 'commerce and agriculture are universally permitted to all classes and under the general designation of servants to the other three tribes, the Sudras seem to be allowed to prosecute any manufacture. In this tribe are included not only the true Sudras, but also other castes ...daily observation shews even Brahmins exercising the menial profession of a Sudra.'<sup>3</sup> Rickards also observed the diversity of castes among the workers in various industries. 'He noticed five or six different castes working as carpenters and as many different castes working as bricklayers, often even employed to work on the same building.'<sup>4</sup>

Social mobility in Bengal could be noticed even in the rural areas, in the traditional educational system. Adam's *Reports* show that teachers in vernacular elementary schools came chiefly from the *Kayastha* caste. In Bengal, however, castes both superior and inferior to the *Kayasthas* had invaded the profession. In contrast, in Bihar the monopoly of the *Kayasthas* had not been challenged. In the traditional society vernacular education was particularly suitable for the *Kayastha* caste, a fixed stratum somewhere in the middle of a relatively stable social pyramid. In Bengal, from the eighteenth century, no stratum could be permanently fixed. William Adam himself considered this to be a sign of social change : 'Both the Bengal and Behar districts need an improved system of vernacular instruction ; but

1 W. Ward, *A view of the history...of the Hindoos*, p. 86 n.

2 H. T. Colebrook, *Remarks on the present state of the husbandry and commerce of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1795, p. 133.

3 W. Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer*, 1828, p. 132.

4 R. Rickards, *India : or facts submitted to illustrate the character and condition of the native inhabitants with suggestions for reforming the present system of government*, London, 1829-32, Vol. 1, p. 32.

the former appear to have undergone a social change, partaking the nature of a moral and intellectual discipline, which removes prejudices still to be met and provides facilities not yet to be found in the latter.'<sup>1</sup>

In Calcutta, professions old and new, high and low, were open to all caste groups. The lists of *shroffs* (money-lenders) of Calcutta show that this old profession was not monopolized by any single caste group. The caste breakdown of the students of the Medical College given in Table 5 shows that only three out of fifty students in 1839 were *Baidyas* (whose traditional occupation was medicine).

Table 5.<sup>2</sup> *The students of Calcutta Medical College*

Brahmin	5	Goldsmith	2
<i>Baidya</i>	3	Bankers	8
<i>Kayastha</i>	15	Miscellaneous	10
Druggist	1		
Weaver	6	Total	50

If castes in Calcutta could not be regarded as hereditary occupational groups then the intercaste relationships and the caste hierarchical order were also undergoing profound changes. The taboos regarding food and pollution could not be enforced rigidly, where the Brahmin had to share the same civic amenities along with other castes – often living in the same street – and when they had to work in an office all day or conduct business at the docks. In about 1821, a book called *Karmalochan* was published, which listed the daily religious duties that a pious Hindu should perform. The publisher soon discovered that men in Calcutta were reluctant to purchase the work, 'as the instances of their religious omissions were so numerous recorded in it, that they were afraid of being reduced to beggary, by imposition of fines from the Brahmin on account of neglect of religious rites'.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it was widely believed outside Calcutta that the

1 W. Adam, *Reports on the state of education in Bengal*, p. 249.

2 General Committee of Public Instruction, *Report on the colleges and schools for native education...in Bengal for 1838–9*, Calcutta, 1840, p. 42.

3 J. Long, *A descriptive catalogue of Bengali works*, Calcutta, 1855, miscellaneous.



*bhadralok* had 'fallen from the approved usage' (*acharbhrasta*).<sup>1</sup> It would also seem that no particular area was allocated to any particular caste as it had been in the traditional village society. This is demonstrated in Table 4. In Pathuriaghata there were *Radi Kulin* Brahmins like Baidyanath Mukherjee, *Kayasthas* like Ramlochan Ghosh, *Pirali* Brahmins like Gopimohun Tagore, *Subarnavaniks* like Nilmani Mallick and Weavers like Radhakrishna Basak.<sup>2</sup> Pathuriaghata was no exception; all areas in the Indian part of the town were adorned with large houses of the multi-caste *abhijat bhadralok*.

In the new schools and colleges boys from different castes mixed freely. There was no caste privilege in the classrooms or in the playgrounds. In David Hare's school Ramtoonu Lahiri, a poor *Barendra Kulin* Brahmin pupil from Krishnagar used to be bullied by his class monitor called Aditya, who was a Washer-man by caste. This free mixing left a deep imprint, which had a far-reaching influence outside the school compounds. *The Enquirer*, the mouth piece of Young Bengal, observed, 'boys of different castes can never long remain on an equal footing in a class without forgetting and giving up their distinctions'.<sup>3</sup> Menfolk, like their sons, mixed freely at business, at school committees, at public meetings, in *sabhas*, and other public gatherings. The family functions of the *abhijat bhadralok*, marriages, *sradhs*, *pujas* were transformed into multi-caste social gatherings, and were celebrated with great pomp and splendour. The *barowaree* or later the *sarvajanin pujas*, were invented in response to urban life. These *pujas* were not performed in temples or in family chapels but by 'subscription assemblies', annually formed for this purpose only.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century almost every area in Calcutta had such multi-caste 'subscription assemblies'.

Caste, however, remained important, as we shall see, in relation to marriage and inheritance. The rich members of

1 Bhavanicharan Banerjee, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, p. 8.

2 S. S. K. Vol. 2, pp. 757-8.

3 Sivanath Shastri, *Ramtoonu Lahiri o tatkalin Banga samaj* (3rd. ed.), Calcutta, 1909, p. 49. Cf. *The Enquirer*, Feb. 1835, p. 37.

4 *The Friend of India*, May 1820, pp. 129-30, as reprinted in S. S. K. Vol. 1, p. 480.

ritually low caste started to establish horizontal links with caste brothers outside their regions and began movements to improve their ritual status. The *Baidyas* were the first caste to take steps in this direction. In the eighteenth century, under the leadership of Raja Rajballabh, some of them started wearing the 'sacred thread' and declared themselves 'twice born'.<sup>1</sup> Since 1822 there had been continuous pamphlet warfare between the Brahmin and *Baidya* pandits of Calcutta over the ritual status of the *Baidyas*.<sup>2</sup> In 1831, the *Baidya* doctors, under the leadership of Khudiram Bisharad, who was a teacher of medicine at the Sanskrit College, formed the *Baidya Samaj*, to defend their caste privileges. Although it was primarily for the *Baidya* medical practitioners, the leading members of the caste like Ramkamal Sen gave the new *Samaj* their full support.<sup>3</sup> The ritual status of the Brahmins was also challenged in Calcutta. In 1832, Dharma Sabha called a special meeting to discuss a crucial question concerning the Brahmin-Shudra relationship; they debated whether a Shudra (if he was a *Vaishnava*) could claim 'reverence' from the Brahmin.<sup>4</sup> But despite the evidence of caste consciousness and the importance of caste rules in marriage and inheritance, class consciousness, breaking down the caste barriers, is noticeable. Although the *bhadralok* had yet to evolve a class ideology, they were conscious of their existence as a social group and had every confidence in themselves as an agency for change. They increased in number and in strength during the 1820s. In 1829 Nilratan Haldar wrote that the rise of this 'new class' (*nutan sreni*), whom he earlier referred to as *madhyabitto*, would bring 'economic prosperity' and 'political stability' in Bengal.<sup>5</sup>

A quantitative study of the housing situation in Calcutta con-

1 W. Ward, *A View of the history...of the Hindoos*, p. 95.

2 J. Long, *A descriptive catalogue of Bengali works*. Cf. *Samachar Darpan*, 4 Sept. 1830, in *S. S. K.* Vol. 2, pp. 149–50.

3 *Samachar Darpan*, 6 Aug. 1831 and 13 Aug. 1831 as in *S. S. K.* Vol. 2, pp. 397–8.

4 Bhavanicharan Banerjee, *Biprabhakti chandrika*; cf. Bai[rava] Chandra Datta, *Sri Sri Vaishnava bhakti kaumudi*. These two pamphlets are reprinted in N. N. Law, *Subarnavanik, katha o kirti*, Calcutta, 1940, Vol. 1, pp. 50–64.

5 *Bangadoot*, 13 June 1829, *S.S.K.* Vol. 1, pp. 398–9.

firm the view that many new *bhadralok* moved into the city during the first four decades of the century. By and large the Indians lived in two types of houses, brick buildings for the higher classes and tiled huts and straw huts for the lower classes. It seems that there was a considerable decrease in the total number of houses in Calcutta, in each successive period since 1793, shown in Table 6. The reason for this decrease was not the depopulation of Calcutta but the erection of new and large houses by the wealthy classes, including the English, which meant the demolition of the huts. During the years between 1822 and 1827, while 6,000 huts disappeared, over 3,000 new brick buildings went up as the city became larger and more prosperous.

Table 6<sup>1</sup>

Year	Total number of houses
1793	74,760
1822	67,511
1837	65,469

## V

The class of *abhijat bhadralok* was undoubtedly one of the most important agencies for change in nineteenth-century Bengal. It would be true to say that it was their class interest which stirred them most ; the economic issues such as stamp duties, house tax, the resumption of *la-ki-raj* (rent-free) land, and the general fear that the government might interfere with landed property forced all *abhijat bhadralok*, of all shades of opinion, into agitational movements. They organized public meetings, wrote petitions and in 1838 founded the first political association in India, the Landholders' Society. Many of their other public activities were also economically motivated : they were eager to introduce modern banking, steam navigation and tea plantation. Many invested money and took an active interest in

<sup>1</sup> This table is made from the list of houses printed in C. Finch, 'Vital statistics of Calcutta', p. 170. The process of replacing huts by large houses continued throughout the nineteenth century. This was no doubt partly due to the 1837 Municipal Regulation, which required all straw huts to be removed, but largely due to 'the increased trade and prosperity of the town'. See *Report of the census of Calcutta, 1866*, pp. 13 and 25.

the scheme to colonize Saugar Island.<sup>1</sup> They were all in favour of the modernization and commercialization of the economy of Bengal. However, they were also inspired by ideas which reached them from Europe through books, through personal contacts with some of the more enlightened European officials, the missionaries and the free traders, men like Justice Hyde East, David Hare and James Silk Buckingham. The *bhadralok* had faith in reform and in their ability to change their destiny. In this sense they were all agents of 'modernity'; rising above local and parochial ties, they felt that they had commitments to larger communities. They organized meetings to raise funds to help famine-stricken Ireland, for flood-relief in Barishal or to help the sick migrant labourer in Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> Rammohun Roy went further than most in wanting to make common cause with the 'fighters' for 'liberty' everywhere in England, France, Spain and Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

They were all deeply interested in science and in 'useful knowledge'. Rammohun Roy implored the government 'to instruct the natives of India in Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other useful sciences, which the Nations of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that has raised them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world'.<sup>4</sup> Dwarkanath Tagore was interested in the application of modern science to industry. He also donated large sums to Calcutta Medical College and gave scholarships for medical students.<sup>5</sup> He used to be present at the dissection room of the

1 J. C. Bagal, *Radhakanta Deb* (5th. ed.), Calcutta, 1364, in *Sahitya sadhak charitmala*, Vol. 2, p. 40 Cf. *Samachar Darpan*, 4 Sept. 1833, 22 Jan. 1834, S.S.K. pp. 343-5.

2 *Samachar Darpan*, 29 June 1822, 12 Oct. 1822, 11 May 1833, 1 June 1833, 28 Sept. 1833 and 17 May 1834, S S K. Vol. 1, pp. 149-50, and Vol. 2, pp. 302-7.

3 S. D. Collet, *The life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (3rd. ed.), D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguli (eds.), Calcutta, 1962, pp. 161-3.

4 R. Roy, 'A letter to Lord Amherst on western education', as reprinted in Collet, *op. cit.* p. 458.

5 K. C. Mittra, *Memoir of Dwarkanath Tagore*, pp. 29, 69 and 107. Cf. Shivanath Shastri, *Ramtoonnu Lahiri o tatkalin Banga samaj*, p. 171. Four medical students, Bholanath Bose, Suryakumar Chakravarti, Dwarakanath Bose and Gopal Seal, accompanied Tagore to England in 1845. Tagore provided money for the education of Bose and Chakravarti. It was the very first group of Indian students to go to England for higher studies.

College to discourage prejudice against modern medicine. Radhakanta Deb was an active member of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society ; for a time he served as its vice-president and wrote scholarly papers for it. He helped to introduce smallpox vaccination, attended regularly 'the experiments in the Medical College' and 'every lecture on Natural Philosophy at the houses of his European friends'.<sup>1</sup> Ramkamal Sen sat on a committee which recommended the foundation of Calcutta Medical College, and also on the Fever Hospital Committee which made a number of suggestions for improving the drainage and sanitation of the city.<sup>2</sup> They all helped to further the cause of English education.

The formal political aims of this class were very limited. Recognizing that their interests were tied to the colonial set-up, they all wanted to work within the framework of the British-Indian administration ; no one wanted to rock the boat. No one, not even the young radical students, wanted to follow the American example ; any leaning in that direction was sharply rebuked.<sup>3</sup> In 1838, when the Calcutta *bhadralok* made a membership drive for their Landholders' Society in the *mofussil* areas, they were careful to mention that their activities had the support of the British government.<sup>4</sup> Almost all petitions, whether they were protests against the Press Regulation of 1823 or against the resumption of the *lu-ki-raj* land in 1828 or about the right of the Indians to sit as jurors on the Grand and Petty Juries, started with a preamble which listed the benefits that the natives of India had received from the Company's rule.<sup>5</sup> The Regulations of Cornwallis, particularly the one on the Permanent Settlement, formed the 'Magna Carta' of the *bhadralok*. They held their alien rulers to the promise of the 'rule of law' and 'the security of property' implied in the Cornwallis system. However

1 *A rapid sketch...*, p. 30.

2 P. C. Mittra, *Life of Dewan Ramcomul*, Calcutta, 1880, pp. 1-12. Cf. J. C. Bagal, *Ramkamal Sen and Krishnamohun Bandyopadhyay* (2nd. ed.), Calcutta, 1962, pp. 15-6 and 20-2.

3 *The Enquirer*, Dec. 1834, pp. 25-7, and Jan. 1835, pp. 17-8.

4 *The Landholders' society*, Preface.

5 For the texts of some of these petitions see Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal, 1818-1835*, pp. 173-90.

'the system' was not perfect for it deprived Indians of high administrative posts. Under the Company's government, the politically ambitious *bhadralok* could do little. He could not dream of getting elected or nominated to the Governor's legislative council as his descendants could during the second half of the century ; he could not even be a corporation councillor, as local government was beyond the control of the *bhadralok*. Although the *bhadralok* wanted to work within the framework of the British-Indian administration, they also wanted minor readjustments of existing institutions, to give a better deal for Indians. Indians should be allowed to sit as jurors on the Grand and Petty Juries, work as Justices of the Peace and have some say in the running of local government in Calcutta, to be selected as collectors of revenue or to be promoted to similar high posts in the district headquarters or in the Revenue and Judicial Department.<sup>1</sup>

To achieve these ends the *bhadralok* had to create a strong pressure of public opinion in India and Britain on the British government to concede to Indian demands. The medium through which this was done was new to India ; it included the press, public meetings, petitions and associations. If the Indian elites, in the twentieth century, are steeped in the grammar of modern politics, then the *bhadralok* of Calcutta had started to learn its alphabet during the 1820s. They had yet to evolve a political programme and a political association. But through the process of trial and error, working as has been seen earlier in school committees, organizing public meetings, forming *sabhas* for social and educational purposes, or for religious movements like *Brahmo Samaj* and *Dharma Sabha*, organizing signature campaigns, waging pamphlet wars for some worthy and also some unworthy causes, the *bhadralok* learnt the techniques of modern politics. This was the beginning of what came to be known as the constitutional agitation.

Admittedly, some of the protest meetings and petitions were European-inspired, if not European-controlled. There was a

<sup>1</sup> 'Political faith of educated Hindoos', *The Reformer*, July 1831, as quoted in J. K. Majumdar (ed.), *Indian speeches and documents on British rule 1821 - 1918*, Calcutta, 1937, p. 46.

deep division of opinion within the European community, especially between the free traders and the Company officials, on such issues as the restrictions on the free employment of European capital and skill in India. During the years immediately before the revival of Company's Charter in 1833, free traders mounted a strong agitation in India and in England against the Company. Many protest meetings were held in Calcutta during the late 1820s and in the 1830s, chiefly to petition to Parliament to meet the grievances of the free traders, on colonization, on the restriction of the press, or against the so-called Black Act.<sup>1</sup> They were organized by such men as Theodore Dickens and Thomas Turton, English merchants and lawyers in Calcutta. However, they were able to enlist the support of many *bhadralok* and other 'respectable natives' of the city.<sup>2</sup> The Company officials on their part also succeeded in stirring up Indian opinion against the unrestricted employment of European skill and capital in Bengal. On this issue, the *Samachar Chandrika* echoed *John Bull*, a pro-government English newspaper established in 1821.<sup>3</sup>

It would be wrong to think that the *bhadralok* followed their European friends and patrons passively. They took an active part in organizing such meetings. They spoke from the platforms, signed petitions and joined committees. They were aware that on many issues their interests were tied up with those of the Europeans. Dwarkanath Tagore, speaking at a public meeting held in protest against the 'Black Act', recognized this community of interest : 'we support not only their cause, which in gratitude we are bound to do, but our own'. The Indians, he claimed, suffered from similar Black Acts ; in *mofussil* areas a man could be sent to prison for seven years without the right to appeal against such conviction. He urged his countrymen to help the Europeans : 'the mischief that has commenced will go

1 Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal, 1818-1835*, pp. 9-10. The Act XI of 1836 of the Legislative Council was called 'The Black Act' by the Europeans for it deprived them of their rights to appeal to English Courts of law against the decisions of the 'Mofussil Tribunals'.

2 Calcutta, *Meeting at the Town Hall on 5 January 1835* (a pamphlet issued by the editor of *Bengal Hurkaru*), Calcutta, 1835.

3 *Alexander's East India Magazine*, Vol. 1, Dec. 1830 to June 1831, p. 50.

on unless we all come forward and support each other to put a check on it'.<sup>1</sup>

Many protest meetings were organized, and many petitions were sent to Parliament by the *bhadralok* independently of and sometimes against the interests of the European residents and the wishes of the Company officials. The Jury Act of 1826 failed to satisfy the *bhadralok* and other 'natives of wealth and talent in Calcutta'. This Act allowed 'all good and sufficient persons resident within the limits of the several towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay...[to] be deemed capable of serving as jurors on Grand or Petty Juries and upon all other inquests'.<sup>2</sup> However, it added another clause which stipulated 'that Grand Juries in all cases, and all Juries for the trial of persons professing the Christian Religion, shall consist wholly of persons professing the Christian Religion'. This successfully prevented Indians from sitting on the Grand Juries and Petty Juries for the trial of Europeans; the *bhadralok* complained against this racial discrimination in their newspapers and threatened not to serve in Petty Juries if summoned to do so.<sup>3</sup> They collected two hundred and forty-four signatures to petition to Parliament to repeal this discriminatory clause from the Act and Rammohun Roy lobbied for them in England.<sup>4</sup> Finally, in 1832 Parliament passed a bill, which was initiated by Charles Grant, which not only repealed the objectionable clause but allowed Indians to work as Justices of the Peace. Many other petitions and agitational movements, like that against the resumption of the *la-ki-raj* land, were also

1 Calcutta. *Report of a public meeting held at the Town Hall, Calcutta, on 24 November 1838*, London, 1839, pp. 28–30.

2 George IV 7, Cap. 37, in I O.L. *Parliamentary branch collections*, no. 1, pp. 317–8. The petition against this Act was signed by 128 Hindus and 116 Muslims.

3 *Samachar Darpan*, 3 Feb. 1827, and *Samachar Chandrika*, 16 June 1827. *S.S.K.* Vol. 1, pp. 201–3. But the *bhadralok* did not have the courage to carry out their threat; in 1828 three Bengalis were selected to serve on the Petty Juries; they were Bhavanicharan Banerjee, Krishnamohun Dey and Tarinicharan Mitra, and they carried out their duties without protest. *Samachar Darpan*, 19 Apr. 1828. *S.S.K.* Vol. 1, p. 202.

4 R. Roy, 'Extracts from a letter on Grant's Jury Bill', *India Gazettee*, 22 Jan. 1833, as reprinted in *The English works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, Calcutta, 1947, Pt. 4, pp. 39–41.



conducted by the *bhadralok* independently. These examples show that they had already learnt to use the modern political idiom. H.T. Prinsep noticed the contrast between the Calcutta he left in 1843 and the Calcutta he found on his arrival in 1809. The most marked difference 'was observable amongst the natives of whom there were now large classes, who imitated the English in manners and rivalled them even in literary attainments. Their education was often superficial and they mostly over-estimated the advantage they derived from it ; still they formed a separate public of their own, which had no existence at all when I arrived in 1809 and was daily increasing in influence.'<sup>1</sup>

It is important to remember that the 'native public opinion' which was so noticeable in 1843 began to make itself heard from the end of the 1820s. By then the *bhadralok* had gained at least ten years' experience in journalism and in public work.

It has already been noticed how the press in Calcutta provided a livelihood for a number of editors, authors and printers. The *bhadralok* were quick to recognize the importance of the press as a weapon for agitational movements. In 1830 there were at least seven Bengali, Persian and Nagari weekly newspapers, of which five were owned and edited by the *bhadralok*. Two of these, *Sangbad Kaumudi* (founded in 1821) and *Samachar Chandrika* (founded in 1822), were well established, and competed with each other to gain more readers in Calcutta and in the *mofussil* towns. Many English weeklies like the *Bengal Herald* were controlled by the Bengalis, and some of them had also established a financial interest in some English daily newspapers, like the *Bengal Hurkaru*. In the early part of the 1830s there was a rush by the *bhadralok* to publish new newspapers or gain control over those already established.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly the *bhadralok* were as anxious to defend the free press as the European free traders.

In 1822, when some of the *abhijat bhadralok* gathered to draft a farewell address to the departing Governor General, the Marquis of Hastings, Gopimohun Deb and his son Radhakanta Deb suggested that a clause should be included in the

<sup>1</sup> H. T. Prinsep, 'Three generations in India', p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal*, pp. 69-71, 95-7.

address to congratulate Lord Hastings for abolishing the censorship of the press in Bengal.<sup>1</sup> In 1823, Rammohun Roy and his friends were most active in petitioning against new press regulations, introduced by John Adam.<sup>2</sup> In 1835, the Indians joined the Europeans in a large meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall, to protest against the continued restrictions on the press. Among the ninety-three signatories seeking permission to hold the meeting were Rustomjee Cowasjee, a Parsee merchant, and eight *bhadralok*, Rasick Krishna Mullick, Dwarkanath Tagore, Kalinath Roy, Rassomoy Dutt, Radhamadhab Banerjee, Ashutosh Dey, Promothonath Dey and Chandra Shekhar Deb.<sup>3</sup>

The foundation of *Atmiya Sabha* in 1815, as the first organization for collective thinking, discussion, and reform, marks the beginning of the modern age in Calcutta. No doubt it had a far-reaching effect on the history of the social reform movement. However, the meetings of the *Atmiya Sabha* were informal gatherings of a small elite, who dared to denounce the orthodox religion.<sup>4</sup> There was no formal organization, no constitution, and no programme for action. It was in the field of education and 'public welfare', in the School Book Society and the School Society, in the Committee of Managers of Hindu College, that the *bhadralok* gained valuable organizational experience. They sat on committees which had to function according to a written set of rules, drawn up by the founders. They learnt the techniques of fund-raising, and, in the case of the School Book Society, of establishing contact in the *mofussil* areas through agents. They organized public examinations of school pupils under the management of the School Society, and launched a publicity campaign through the press. They also established contacts, no doubt through the Europeans, with similar societies in Bombay and in London.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that many

1 *Samachar Darpan*, 28 Dec. 1822, *S.S.K.* Vol. 1, p. 233.

2 R. Roy, 'Petitions against the Press Regulation', as reprinted in *The English works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, Pt 4, pp 1-31.

3 Calcutta, *Meeting at the Town Hall*, pp. 2-3.

4 For the history of *Atmiya Sabha* see *Tatvabodhini Patrika*, no 50, Asvin 1769 (Saka era).

5 The Calcutta School Book Society, *The Sixth report* and *The Ninth report*.

of their *sabhas*, like *Gauriya Samaj* in 1823 and *Dharma Sabha* in 1830, were modelled after the School Book Society and the School Society. They drew up a similar set of rules and regulations which governed the formal structures of their societies.<sup>1</sup>

It was important for the ambitious *bhadralok* to be on the school committees, and in the societies for public welfare and social reform. This area of public activity was not directly under the control of the government ; here they could exercise considerable power, influencing the policies of institutions, appointing or sacking teachers, nominating students and controlling finance.<sup>2</sup> Men who wished to gain the leadership of Calcutta society had to be involved in these activities. The leading men would be invited to tea parties at the Bishop of Calcutta's house, or to the receptions at Government House, or at the end of the period would be nominated as jurors on the Grand Jury or as Justices of the Peace or appointed to such semi-official bodies as the General Committee for Public Instruction. In short, the *abhijat bhadralok* who were active in educational and social reform were respected by their fellow countrymen, and the government accepted them as representatives of 'native opinion'. It was natural that there should be such keen competition to gain control of schools and other societies.<sup>3</sup>

1 For the history and the activities of the short-lived *Gauriya Samaj* see *Samachar Darpan*, 8 Mar. 1823, 28 Mar. 1823, 17 May 1823 and 3 July 1824, S.S.K. Vol. 1, pp. 10-3. For the rules and regulations of *Dharma Sabha* see *Samachar Darpan*, 23 Jan. 1830 and 6 Feb. 1830, S.S.K. Vol. 1, pp. 300-3 and 304-6.

2 The Government of the College was vested in a committee of Managers consisting of Hereditary Governors ('contributors of 5,000 rupees and upward to the College Fund before the aggregate sum of a lakh and a half of sicca rupees may have been subscribed to that fund'). Governors for life ('contributors of 5,000 rupees and upwards after the target of one and a half lakh of rupees had been reached), and Directors, annually elected by subscribers, whose joint or separate subscriptions to its college amounted to at least 5,000 rupees. The committee of managers consisted entirely of Hindu *bhadralok* who had complete power over the running of the college. Since 1824, however, the government had tried to control the policy of the college, through H. H. Wilson who was nominated as the Visitor of the college. Government of Bengal, Education Department, *Presidency College Register*, Calcutta, 1927, pp. 5-6.

3 In 1833 the Calcutta Supreme Court nominated seven Indians to the Grand Jury.

There was a deep division of opinion and rivalry between groups within the *bhadralok* class. Although there was a wide spectrum of views, ranging from Bhavanicharan Banerjee's to those of the young students of Hindu College, the *bhadralok* of Calcutta could be divided into two large groups, as we have already noticed, the 'liberals' led by Rammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore and the 'conservatives' led by Gopimohun Deb and his son Radhakanta Deb.

However, these ideological labels had limited application. There was no deep division of opinion over any important political issue except on European colonization. But there are good reasons to believe that on this issue the 'conservatives' were largely influenced by some Company officials, who on their part supported the 'conservatives' on *sati*.<sup>1</sup> The liberal-nationalists and some Marxist historians have presented Rammohun Roy and his *Brahmo Samaj* movement as the only agents of modernity, who had to wage war against the orthodox party led by Deb. All too often, the contribution made by Deb, Sen, Seal and other 'conservatives' to the cause of modernity is glossed over. Some have even tried to discover a class basis for the ideological cleavage. Professor Ahmed suggested that the 'conservatives' 'had more links with land than' with trade', whereas the 'liberals' were largely merchants.<sup>2</sup> This is rather too simple. It has already been noticed that the *bhadralok*, 'conservative' or 'liberal', was deeply interested in modernizing the economy, was involved in trade and had invested money in land. Radhamadhab Banerjee, a member of the orthodox *Dharma Sabha*, was a director of the Union Bank and Dwarkanath Tagore, the 'liberal', was a big landlord.

In fact in our analysis of the social and political development of Calcutta in the nineteenth century we should not look at modernity in opposition to tradition. The 'conservatives' were interested in English education, modern science, and in modernization of the economy. Radhakanta Deb, a Director of Hindu College, a member of the Calcutta School Book Society and the native Secretary of the Calcutta School Society,

1 *Alexander's East India Magazine*, Vol. 1, Dec. 1830 to June 1831, p. 50.

2 Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal, 1818-1835*, pp. 169-70.

did more than his 'liberal' opponents for the encouragement of English education. It was in his father's house that the Calcutta School Society held their annual examinations and prize-giving ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> They were as much interested as Rammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore 'to raise the natives of India to a higher state of civilization and welfare'.<sup>2</sup> But if the 'conservatives' acted as the agents of modernity then the 'liberals' were not so alienated from tradition as they have often been presented to us.

Dwarkanath Tagore, despite his zeal for the Vaidantic religion, did not hesitate to give a feast to the *Chaubey*s in Vrindavan, and to feed over 50,000 Brahmins and others during the *sradh* ceremony of his mother.<sup>3</sup> Prasannakumar Tagore, another member of the *Brahmo Samaj*, performed the family *Durga Puja* with the pomp and splendour that befits an *abhijat bhadralok*, for which, however, he earned a nickname, the 'half-enlightened' reformer.<sup>4</sup> But this snide remark from the young radical students was unjustified, since 'the Father of Modern India' himself was unwilling to give up his 'sacred thread'. Also, through his *Brahmo Samaj*, Rammohun Roy ceremoniously donated to the Brahmins, every year, as a *bhadralok* should do. In England, although he accepted invitations to dine with Europeans, 'his food is solely vegetables or sweetmeats, as he conforms in every essential particular to the habits of his country'.<sup>5</sup> Others, like the Basaks, as we have already noticed, found no particular difficulty in following the traditional religion and being engaged in reform.

There was a difference of opinion dividing the *bhadralok*. Rammohun Roy believed that 'the organization of society' depended on religion. Since Hinduism had imposed unnecessary

1 *The Calcutta annual register for the 1821*, Calcutta, 1823, pp. 79–80.

2 Radhakanta Deb to W. H. MacNaughton, 9 Nov. 1835, in Banerjee *I.H.R.C.* Vol. 9, p. 106.

3 K. C. Mittra, *Memoir of Dwarkanath Tagore*, p. 36. Cf. *Samachar Darpan*, 31 Mar. 1838, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, p. 543.

4 *Samachar Darpan*, 10 Dec. 1831, and *Samachar Chandrika*, 12 Nov. 1831, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, pp. 419 and 527–9.

5 *Tatvabodhini Patrika* no. 50. Cf. *Alexander's East India Magazine*, Vol. 1, Dec. 1830 to June 1831, pp. 557–66.

restrictions on the Hindus, which denied them 'social comfort' and disqualified them from entering into 'difficult enterprises', he insisted that some religious reform was essential at least 'for the sake of their [Indians'] political and social comfort'. When *sati* was abolished, he wrote to his friends in England, that since the Act had 'removed the odium from our character as a people... we now deserve every improvement temporal and spiritual'.<sup>1</sup> The 'conservatives', however, did not find any necessary connexion between 'political and social comfort' and religious reform. They were eager to separate their religion from secular activities. Radhakanta Deb agreed to work with the School Book Society, provided no 'religious matter' was introduced into their publications.<sup>2</sup> No religious instruction was allowed in Hindu College; when Derozio was suspected of encouraging his students to question the authority of Hinduism, he had to resign. In 1824 the managers of the College were forced to seek financial help from the government, and had to agree to share its management with a government nominee. However, they reminded the General Committee of Public Instruction that the College 'is a Hindu institution for the purpose of cultivating especially English literature and science alone, that the admission of persons likely to injure respectability and consequently, to contract the utility of the College will always be strictly prohibited, and that works directed against the character and principles of our countrymen will be also excluded'.<sup>3</sup> They protested against Bentinck's Regulation to abolish *sati*, for they considered such an act was a direct interference with Hindu religion and custom.<sup>4</sup>

The 'conservatives' kept firm control over Hindu College. Baidyanath Mukherjee, the Secretary of the College, was originally a member of Rammohun's *Atmiya Sabha*, but he broke

1 R. Roy, *Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin or a gift to deists* (ed. and trans. by Moulavi Obaidullah Obaide), reprint, Calcutta, 1949, pp. 6–7. Cf. 'Letter to a friend', 14 July 1832, as published in 'Notes on the suttee and its abolition', in Benoy Ghosh, *Report of the Regional Records Survey Committee of West Bengal 1958–9*, Calcutta, 1959.

2 Deb to MacNaughton, *I.H.R.C.* Vol. 9, p. 109.

3 *Presidency College Register*, p. 6.

4 See the Petition of the Hindus against the abolition of *sati* (Regulation XVII of 1829) as reprinted in Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal, 1818–1835*, pp. 176–9.

his connexions with the *Sabha* soon after Rammohun launched an open campaign against Hindu orthodoxy. Lakshminarayan Mukherjee, Baidyanath's son, followed his father as the Secretary of the Hindu College, and he was a supporter of *Dharma Sabha* in 1830. Gopimohun Tagore and his sons Chandrakumar and Prasannakumar were the only supporters of Rammohun Roy to be connected with the management of the College. The 'liberals' were also in the minority on the committees of the School Book Society and the School Society; only Prasannakumar Tagore was associated with these societies. However, by 1832 the Committee of the School Book Society had included Dwarkanath Tagore and Radhaprasad Roy (son of Rammohun).<sup>1</sup>

As we probe a little deeper we begin to realize the complexity of the situation. The caste analysis of the two contesting groups brings out an interesting pattern. Although Rammohun succeeded in bringing together men from all castes (there were *Kayasthas* like Kalinath Munshi, Brindaban Mitra, and Nandakisore Bose, and *Subarnavaniks* like Kasi Nath Mullick), most of his active supporters were Brahmins, *Radi Kulins*, like Kali Sankar Ghosal, Baidyanath Mukherjee, Ananda Banerjee, Braja Mohun Majumdar and Ramchandra Vidyabagis, or *Piralis (bhagna Kuln)*, like the Tagores, Dwarkanath, his brothers and cousins, or *Barendra Kulins*, like Tarachand Chakrabarti.<sup>2</sup> The leading members of the *Dharma Sabha* group were non-Brahmins; only two out of thirteen committee members were Brahmins. The protectors of orthodox Brahmanism were *Maulik* (low grade) *Kayasthas* like the Debs, or *Subarnavaniks* like Motilal Seal or *Baidyas* like Ramkamal Sen.<sup>3</sup>

1 *The Ninth report of the Calcutta School Book Society*, p. vii.

2 Shivanath Shastri, *Ramtoonu Lahiri o tatkalin Banga samaj*, pp. 22–41 and 95–114. Cf. M. N. Ghosh, 'Friends and followers of Rammohun', in A. Home (ed.), *Rammohun Roy, the man and his works*, Calcutta, 1933, pp. 124–32.

3 The following men were selected as the members of the *Dharma Sabha* Committee after the first meeting held at Calcutta Sanskrit College on 17 January 1830: Ramgopal Mallick, Gopimohun Deb, Radhakanta Deb, Tarinicharan Mitra, Ramkamal Sen, Harimohun Tagore, Kashinath Mallick, Maharaj Kalikrishna Bahadur, Ashutosh Sarkar, Gokolnath Mallick, Baisnavadas Mallick, Nilmani Dey and Bhavanicharan Banerjee (the Secretary); *Samachar Chandrika*, 23 Jan. 1830, *S.S.K.* Vol. 1, p. 301.

It is interesting to note that many writers, social reformers and politicians during the nineteenth century were *Radi Kulin* Brahmins. In fact four great Bengalis, Rammohun Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sir Surendranath Banerjea, and Ranglal Banerjee, were descended from three branches of the same Bando-Ghoti family.<sup>1</sup>

Benoy Ghosh attaches great significance to the fact that two great social reformers, Raja Rammohun Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, came from the *Radi Kulin* Brahmin caste. He argues that social reforms were inaugurated by the *Radi Kulin* Brahmins to safeguard their own interests. The strict laws of endogamy, the prohibition of the remarriage of widows, kulinism and polygamy left many women of this caste childless, consequently the caste was decreasing in number. The social reforms concerning *sati*, the remarriage of widows and polygamy aimed at increasing the birth rate.<sup>2</sup> However, although it is generally acknowledged that the *Radi Kulin* Brahmins were numerically weak, there is no hard evidence to support Ghosh's thesis.

It is more fruitful to look at the two contesting groups as two leading *dals*. *Dals* were social factions, formed under the leadership of a rich man, a *dalapati*. Although a member of any caste could aspire to be a *dalapati*, the majority of the *dalapatis* in Calcutta were either Brahmin or *Kayastha*. Most *dals* were multi-caste bodies ; *Baidyas*, *Kayasthas*, *Tilis*, *Kaibartyas*, *Sadgops*, Weavers, *Subarnavaniks* and Brahmins could belong to the same *dal* and the Brahmins in many *dals* accepted the leadership of other castes. There were, however, some castes, like the *Subarnavaniks*, who had their own caste *dal*. Most Calcutta *dalapatis* had followers in the rural areas, in their *zamindaris* and their ancestral villages<sup>3</sup>

In the eighteenth century, all disputes concerning caste were

1 N. N. Vasu, *Banger jatiya itihās, Brahman kanda*, Calcutta, n.d., p. 256. Cf. Pandit Lal Mohan Vidyānidhī, *Sambandha nirṇaya*, Vol. 1, Calcutta, 1874, Appendix.

2 B. Ghosh, *Vidyasagar o Bangali samaj*, Vol. 1 (2nd. ed.), Calcutta, 1371, pp. 74-6,

3 Bhavanicharan Banerjee, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, pp. 28-34. Cf. *Samachar Chandrika*, 5 Jan. 1833, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, pp. 271-2.



decided at the *jatimala* or 'caste-cutcherries'; it would seem that such 'cutcherries' had some formal recognition and two *dals*, one led by Nubkissen and the other by Madan Datta, competed with each other to get the leadership of Bengali Hindu society in Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> As more rich Hindus moved into Calcutta during the latter part of the eighteenth century many new *dals* were formed. Since about the end of the eighteenth century all disputes concerning the caste rules on pollution, marriage, status within the *jatīs* and sometimes even disputes over the inheritance of property, were settled at 'courts' held in *dalapatis*' houses. Dwijendranath Tagore recalled, in his *Memoirs*, the days when his grandfather Dwarkanath and his father Debendranath 'ruled the society' (*samaj sasan*) as *dalapatis* and settled many disputes between the members of the *dals* which would usually be decided, in the twentieth century, in a court of law.<sup>2</sup>

In the absence of a church, or of even the caste *panchayats*, or chieftains' or old *zamindars*' courts, the *dals* gave Hindu society in Bengal, as Ghosh put it, 'its coherence, its submission to discipline, its recognition of leaders, its respect for tradition'.<sup>3</sup> Even Dwijendranath Tagore, a *Brahmo* leader, praised the *dals*, for they curbed the 'evils of individualism' and provided the society with cohesion and authority, and through the *dals* the 'traditional culture' was able to continue despite the changes of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The *dalapatis*, like the old rajas, patronized Brahmin pandits, and *ghataks* (match-makers), who debated on knotty problems of Hindu theology, wrote eulogies for their patrons, prepared 'family histories' (*Kula Panjikas*) and gave *vyavasthas* (decrees) on problems concerning caste rules and customary laws.

The activities of the *dals* were not devoid of politics. This was an area of power over which the British government had no control. While the British managed state affairs, the *dalapatis* 'ruled the society'. The *dalapatis* had considerable authority and influence over men in Calcutta and in the rural areas where

1 'Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen', I.O.R. Home Miscellaneous Series, no. 773, pp. 237-9.

2 Dwijendranath Thakurer *smritikatha*, p. 285.

3 N. N. Ghosh, *Nubkissen*, p. 191.

4 Dwijendranath Thakurer *smritikatha*, pp. 285-6. \*

some of the *dals* had links. The *dalapatis* enforced their *vyavasthas* on caste rules through the weapon of excommunication, and everyone feared excommunication. If a person were excommunicated, then he might not be able to marry his children off or obtain a priest to perform the family rites, he might not be invited to traditional social functions like *sradhs*, *pujas* and marriages and his invitations for such occasions might not be accepted. So all *bhadralok* felt the necessity of belonging to a *dal*. If a person fell out with his *dalapati*, he could move to another *dal* or if he was rich enough and influential enough he could form his own *dal*, or live as an outcaste. The protection of a *dal* was essential; Nilmani Mullick, and his family, as *dalapati* 'introduced several reforms amongst their kinsmen, and saved many from excommunication of caste or other social degradation'.<sup>1</sup> Nabakrishna Sinha saved a *Tili* family from excommunication despite the opposition from the other members of his *dal*.<sup>2</sup>

Caste grades and ranks were also decided by the *dals*. Although theoretically the Bengali Hindu society was divided into two *varnas* and forty-one *jatis*, no *jati* in Bengal was a homogeneous group. Each *jati* was subdivided into numerous groups, with strict marriage laws and hierarchical orders within it. *The Friend of India* observed that in Bengal every caste was subdivided into numerous classes, each given a certain rank or status by tradition.

'Hence the station of every individual in Bengal is settled with nearly as much precision as that of the nobility of Europe... No family is lost in the crowd; there are always some beneath it, who view its right and dignity with feelings of respect; every individual therefore possesses an acknowledged and defined rank in this mighty aristocracy. These family distinctions may be tarnished by ignoble alliances, but they may be regained by a series of advantageous marriages.'<sup>3</sup>

Thus marriage was an important area of human activity for men seeking higher rank. The *ghataks* played a key role in all

1 L. N. Ghose, *The Modern history of the Indian chiefs...*, p. 59.

2 *Samachar Chandrika*, 24 Dec. 1831, S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 266-7.

3 *The Friend of India*, Vol. 1, p. 84.

important marriage alliances, they compiled and interpreted the *Kulapanjikas* (marriage registers or family histories) and decided on the suitability of marriages. The *dalapatis* who patronized the compilers of the *Kulapanjikas* were able to improve their own status and exercise authority over men. Nubkissen, although a *Maulik Kayastha*, managed to marry his grandson to the daughter of the celebrated *Goshtipati* Gopikanta Sinha of Gopinagar through his *ghataks*, and thus 'constituted his grandson as the Thirteenth *Goshtipati* from Srimanta Raya'.<sup>1</sup> His descendants claimed, in the nineteenth century, the *Kulin* status. Tagores also had their own *ghataks* who wrote the 'family histories' of their patrons.<sup>2</sup> The *dalapatis* also helped their castes to move up in the ritual ladder ; thus the *Baidyas* were helped by Rajballabh and were already claiming the status of 'the twice born'. The *Kayasthas* soon followed them, and the Deb family and their *dal* played a prominent part in it.<sup>3</sup> Many rich men of very low ritual status started claiming the *Kayastha* status. The rich cousins of *Kaibartya* Rajendra Das were claiming such status in the 1830s but they could only be recognized as *Kayasthas* if their claim was supported by such a *dalapati* as Deb.<sup>4</sup>

It was important for the *bhadralok* who wished to acquire authority and influence over men in Calcutta to be active in the *dals*. Thus the *bhadralok* who wanted to be a representative of 'native opinion' must be active in 'public welfare', in the colleges and societies ; he should also be a *dalapati* or at least be a leading member of an influential *dal* in Calcutta. Through the *dals*, the leading men in Calcutta acquired high status and exercised considerable influence and authority over men in Calcutta and outside. In 1833, Ashutosh Dey, son of Ramdoolal, decided to break away from Madan Datta's *dal* and form his own *dal*. He was already an important figure in Calcutta ; he was a son of the richest man in the city and a formidable businessman in his own right ; he was active in the schools, in societies and a prominent

1 *A rapid sketch of Raja Radhakanta Deb*, p. 17.

2 *A Brief account of the Tagore family*, Calcutta, 1868, pp. 1–5. Cf. K. C. Mitra, *Memoir of Dwarkanath Tagore*, pp. 2–3.

3 N. N. Ghosh, *Nubkissen*, pp. 169–91.

4 *Samachar Darpan*, 5 Aug. 1837, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, pp. 273–5.

member of the *Dharma Sabha* Committee. However, he still felt the need to have a *dal* of his own, which no doubt gave him even higher status than he already had and he exercised even more influence over men of all castes in Calcutta and outside, who accepted him as their leader.<sup>1</sup>

The traditional style of politics was largely concerned with caste status. It meant competition among the elites of Calcutta to gain status and power through the *dals*. There were many *dals* in Calcutta, but during our period some *dals* were more important than others. It seems that there were at least two leading *dals*; that of the Tagores and that of the Debs. It must be noted, however, that the Tagores were not united; Harimohun Tagore and Ladlimohun Tagore, step-brothers of Gopimohun Tagore and Umananda Tagore, another member of the Pathuria-ghata branch of the family, were in Deb's *dal* and were active in the *Dharma Sabha*.<sup>2</sup> The Debs managed to bring together many *dalapatis* under their leadership in the *Dharma Sabha*, and a large majority of these *dalapatis* were non-Brahmins. Dwarkanath Tagore also succeeded in gaining the support of many *dalapatis* like Kalinath Munshi of Taki and individuals for Rammohun's *Brahmo Samaj*. Many contemporaries considered *Brahmo Samaj* and *Dharma Sabha* as two rival *dals*.<sup>3</sup> In fact they were two rival groups, each an amalgam of many *dals* contesting for status and power.

The activities of Rammohun Roy, who was a newcomer to Calcutta, who had no *dal* of his own and who insisted on conducting politics solely in the modern idiom, threatened, at least for a time, the power of the *dals*. The young students of the Hindu College, who ate beef and drank wine also defied the authority of the *dals*. But even Rammohun had to enlist the support of some of the established families like the Tagores and had to patronize the Brahmins, both through his *Brahmo Samaj*

1 *Samachar Darpan*, 5 Jan. 1833, S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 271–2. Many new *dals* were formed during this period and it was considered important to publish their news in a separate periodical called *Dalabrittanta* printed solely for that purpose. See *Samachar Chandrika*, 23 Sept. 1831 and 21 July 1832, S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 181–2.

2 *Samachar Chandrika*, 13 Feb. 1830, S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 306–7.

3 *Samachar Darpan*, 1 July 1837, S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 272–3.

and through his Vedanta College.<sup>1</sup> It is also doubtful whether the Young Bengal would have been able to defy authority had they not had the indulgence of some of their elders, especially of Prasannakumar Tagore who sat on the Committee of Managers during the troubled years.

The successful leading men had to master the two languages of politics. They had to learn to bargain with their masters for a better deal for their class and compete with each other to gain control of areas of power open to them. Yet at another level they fought each other as *dals* to gain high status and power over men.<sup>2</sup> What is, however, more significant, the shrewd *bhadralok* was able to use the modern media of communication, like the press, to extend the authority of the *dals* and use the authority and the contacts of the *dalapatis* to strengthen the position of a modern association like the *Dharma Sabha*.

On 17 January, 1830 the 'conservatives' formed the *Dharma Sabha* to agitate against Regulation XVII of 1829, which prohibited the practice of *sati*. This was at once a modern association and an amalgam of traditional *dals*. It worked as a modern association should, with a programme of action, a committee with a president, a treasurer and a secretary, and a set of rules which delimited the power of the committee. The secretary meticulously kept a book of minutes and an account of its funds. They opened 'branch' *sabhas* in Dacca, Murshidabad, Santipur, Benaras, Cuttak and in Bhawanipur. The *bhadralok*, the *zamin-dars*, lawyers, *tahsildars*, Brahmins, *Baidyas*, *Kayasthas* and others of the *mofussil* towns joined these 'branch *sabhas*', collected signatures for the petition against Bentinck's Regulation, got the local pandits to write *vyavasthas* in support of *sati* and collected subscriptions for the Calcutta *Dharma Sabha*. They appointed agents in England to lobby for their cause.<sup>3</sup> But the

1 Collet, *The life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*, pp. 189–92.

2 *Daladali* (feuds among *dals*) was a part of the *abhijat bhadralok's* life in Calcutta throughout the nineteenth century. See *Dwijendranath Thakurer smritikatha*, pp. 285–6.

3 For activities of the *Dharma Sabha*, cf. *Samachar Darpan*, 23 Jan. 1830, 6 Feb. 1830 and *Samachar Chandrika*, 13 Feb. 1830, in *S.S.K.* Vol. 1, pp. 300–7, and *Samachar Chandrika*, 6 May 1830 (British Museum reference 141.33. G. 6).

*Sabha* also worked as a *dal*, a 'caste tribunal', what George Johnson called the 'black tribunal'.<sup>1</sup> The *Sabha* gave *vyavasthas* on caste rules, marriage and inheritance ; and imposed their will by the threat of excommunication. The pages of *Samachar Chandrika* are full of references to such disputes on which the Pandits of *Dharma Sabha* gave their *vyavastha*. They decided, for instance, whether or not the second brother of a certain Navakumar Mukherjee of Jahanabad had forfeited his right to inherit ancestral property since he had been living with a *chandal* (untouchable) woman, or whether a Shudra could act as a *guru* of a Brahmin. The *Sabha* also tried to excommunicate the *sati-dvesis* (the abolitionists).<sup>2</sup>

The success of the *Dharma Sabha* as the first Calcutta society to mobilize men in and outside Calcutta to resist a government measure, is rather startling. Within the first five months of its existence the *Sabha* was able to establish most of its 'branches' and the organizers had already collected 1,146 signatures protesting against the abolition of *sati*, by 14 January 1830, three days before the formal launching of the *Sabha*.<sup>3</sup> The petition did not move Bentinck and the appeal was dismissed by the Privy Council.<sup>4</sup> However, the organizational experience was very valuable to the *bhadralok*. In the *Dharma Sabha* and in the agitation for *sati* the *bhadralok* learnt the techniques of using the traditional channels like the *dals* to mobilize men for modern agitational movements. The energy that was generated by such activities in the Calcutta *bhadralok* could well be used for agitation for their political and economic advancement. After

1 George H. Johnson. *The stranger in India or three years in Calcutta*, London, 1843, Vol. 2, p. 152.

2 *Samachar Chandrika*. 5 July 1830 and 12 Oct. 1832 Cf *Alexander's East India Magazine*, Vol. 1, pp 403-4. It was becoming increasingly difficult to impose the sanctions. In the case of Navakumar Mukherjee's brother, the *Dharma Sabha* decreed that a man 'who is given up to licentious pleasures' must not be allowed to inherit his father's estate. But they had no way to impose their sanction since the English courts would not recognize such a sanction. If, however, they had a powerful local *dal* they imposed strict excommunication.

3 *Samachar Darpan*, 23 Jan 1830, S.S K. Vol. 1, pp 292-3.

4 J. C. Bagal, *Radhakanta Deb*, p 39 n. Cf. Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal, 1818-1835*, p. 125.

1832, when the Privy Council rejected the appeal from the 'conservatives', the '*Dharma Sabha*' ceased to function as a modern society for social reform and agitation and became a mere 'caste tribunal'.<sup>1</sup> However, the leading members of *Dharma Sabha*, Ramkamal Sen, Maharaja Kali Krishna Bahadur and Radhakanta Deb, were able to use their organizational experience and to canalize the energy of their members to a secular cause. It was the *dalapatis* of *Dharma Sabha* who led the other *bhadralok*, the Muslim *zamindars* and the European free traders in founding the first political association in India in 1838.

Economic and political interests had brought all *bhadralok* together to organize protest meetings and sign petitions from time to time. In 1826 it was against the the Jury Act, in 1827 against the stamp duties, in 1828 against the resumption of *lalki-raj* land and again in 1835 for the free press.<sup>2</sup> But they had no secular political society to organize movements to further their cause. In 1833 it was suggested in a Bengali pamphlet issued by *The Reformer*, a liberal newspaper, that the Bengali *zamindars* should have such a society,<sup>3</sup> but nothing came of it. A similar attempt by Roy Kalinath Chaudhuri and Ramlochan Ghosh and some members of the *Brahmo Samaj* also failed. Their society, *Barngabhasa Prakasika Sabha*, founded in December 1836, became a defunct body by January 1837.<sup>4</sup>

The first serious step towards the formation of a political association was taken in 1836, in the *Dharma Sabha*. It was conceived by H. H. Wilson, who put his ideas to Ramkamal Sen. Sen proposed at a meeting of the *Dharma Sabha* on 23 April 1836, that 'a branch society should be immediately formed, where matters affecting the public welfare such as *zamindaris*

1 *Sangbad Prabhakar*, 16 Apr. 1848, as published in Benoy Ghosh (ed.), *Samayikpatre Banglar samajchitra* (S B S.), Vol. 1, pp 168–9.

2 The Requisition for the meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall to protest against the Stamp Duty was signed by both Rammohun Roy and Radhakanta Deb. The meetng, however, was not allowed by the Sheriff of Calcutta and the organizer held the meeting at Calcutta Exchange Room. *Samachar Darpan*, 12 and 19 May 1827, S.S K. Vol. 1, pp. 198–200.

3 *Samachar Darpan*, 31 Aug. 1833, S.S.K. Vol. 2, p. 157.

4 *Samachar Darpan*, 17 Dec., 31 Dec. 1836 and 7 Jan. 1837. S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 398–405.

and agricultural disquisitions should be treated of, [*sic*] instead of those limited dull questions, which now occupy the society's attention'. This was approved by the president Maharaja Kalikrishna Bahadur, but was opposed by Bhavanicharan Banerjee, who saw a threat to orthodox religion in the formation of a secular *sabha*. Banerjee was out-voted and it was agreed that a special meeting should be held 'to consider the expediency of establishing a branch society for the purpose suggested'.<sup>1</sup>

There was, however, no special meeting of the *Dharma Sabha* to discuss the proposal, at least not in public. Instead, Ramkamal Sen and other leading members of the *Dharma Sabha* called a meeting of all the *zamindars* in Calcutta, in November 1837 at Hindu College, to consider the expediency of forming a society to protect landed property in Bengal. The meeting was attended by the 'liberals' as well as by the 'conservatives', and it was decided to form a committee, which consisted of Radhakanta Deb, Ramkamal Sen, Bhavanicharan Mitra (all connected with the *Dharma Sabha*) and Prasannakumar Tagore, to write a manifesto and the rules and regulations for the proposed society.<sup>2</sup>

In March 1838 the committee put its proposal to a large audience consisting of all leading *abhijat bhadralok* of Calcutta, Muslim *zamindars* like Munshi Muhammad Amir, Europeans like Prinsep, Hare and Dickens. The meeting decided to form the Landholders' Society, primarily to defend private property in land, and to achieve the extension of the Permanent Settlement to North-Western Province, repeal Regulation XII of 1828 and improve the position of the *zamindars*. All landholders, irrespective of caste, creed and colour, were allowed to join the Society, provided they paid Rs. 5 as admission fee and Rs. 20 as the yearly subscription. The meeting appointed the first committee of the Society, which consisted of 'liberals' like Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasannakumar Tagore, 'conservatives' like Ramkamal Sen and Radhakanta Deb, one Muslim *zamindar*, Munshi Muhammad Amir, and free traders like George Prinsep. It is

1 *Alexander's East India Magazine*, July–Dec. 1836, Vol. 12, p. 366. Cf. *Samachar Darpan*, 30 Apr. 1836, S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 595–6.

2 *Samachar Darpan*, 12 Nov. 1837, S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 405–6.



significant to note that five out of the twelve members of the Committee were from the *Dharma Sabha*.<sup>1</sup>

The Society was never big (it is doubtful whether the membership was ever more than two hundred)<sup>2</sup> and it became a defunct body by the end of the 1840s. Nevertheless, it can claim to be the parent of all subsequent political associations in India in the nineteenth century. Its organization and its techniques of agitation were used by loyal Indian subjects, in the British-India Association, in the Indian Association and even in the Indian National Congress. They all wanted to work within the British-India system, had faith in British justice, wanted to create a pressure of public opinion in Britain and in India on the British government to make political concession to the Indians. The Landholders' Society, although formed primarily to protect the interest of the landholders, had wider political implications. It was interested in preventing the resumption of rent-free tenure, and in extending the Permanent Settlement to North-Western Province, and also in reforming the police system, and the Revenue and Judicial Department, in the free use of capital in Indian agriculture and in the humane treatment of the Indian coolies in Mauritius. It opened branches in various parts of the Provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and appointed John Crawford as a regular agent in London.<sup>3</sup>

In the preceding pages I have argued that the economic and administrative changes in Bengal brought about a social erosion. The most significant change took place in Calcutta, which witnessed the rise of a new urban class. The economic and political interests of this class forced the *bhadralok* into agitational movements and finally in 1838 they formed the first political association in India, not only to protect the landed interest but also to press for the political and economic advancement of the class. Men with economic power and high status formed the elite of

1 *The Landholders' society. Rules and regulations of.* pp. 6–10 and 27. The five *Dharma Sabha* members were Raja Rajnarayan Bahadur, Roy Kalikrishna Bahadur, Radhakanta Deb, Asutosh Dey and Ramkama Sen.

2 Ninety-four *zamindars* joined the Society after the first meeting, four of whom were Muslims. See *The Landholders' society*, p. 33.

3 *Op. cit.* p. 38. Cf. *Bengal Hurkaru*, 14 and 15 Dec. 1839.

this class (the *dalapatis*). But since status was still attached to caste, men seeking higher status had to work through the traditional *dals*. The *dalapatis* also used the *dals* for modern politics, for both horizontal and vertical mobilization, to establish contacts in the *mofussil* areas and to exert pressure on their followers for agitation. But if politics were conducted through traditional channels it was the end of the caste 'tradition'<sup>1</sup> and status society and the beginning of a market and competitive society.

1 E. R. Leach (ed.), *Aspects of caste in South India, Ceylon and North-west Pakistan*: Cambridge papers in Social Anthropology, no. 2, Cambridge, 1960, pp. 4-9

## DALADALI IN CALCUTTA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY\*

In this paper I wish to illustrate the hypothesis that a necessary correlate of stable social order is a system of controlled conflict. In other words, a social system depends for its cohesion on the existence of conflicts in smaller sub-systems, provided that the conflicts are conducted within an accepted convention. Hence faction-feuds in a social system are not necessarily evidence of fission in that system and may also be evidence of fusion. I wish to illustrate this theme, what Gluckman<sup>1</sup> called 'The peace in the feud', from evidence from Calcutta in the nineteenth century.

*Daladali* is an important institution of Bengali social life, at least since the end of the eighteenth century. It is mentioned in various biographies and memoirs<sup>2</sup> and the newspapers in the nineteenth century regularly published the activities of various *dals* in Calcutta. Many administrators and foreign observers like George Johnson, J. C. Jack and R. Carstairs noticed 'that great Bengali institution doladoli, or the faction feud which had possession of almost every family, especially every great family in the land.'<sup>3</sup>

\* The research for this paper was undertaken as the Director of a project, 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815 – 1876'. This research project was sponsored by the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and was financed by the Indian Council of Social Science Research in 1970–71. I am most grateful to the Institute and the Council and, more particularly, to J.P. Naik, for their generous assistance. I am also grateful to my project assistants, particularly to Prathama Sen. Mary Murnane, of the Department of History, Sydney University, has made some valuable suggestions, which were particularly helpful in revising the first draft of the paper.

1 Max Gluckman, *Custom and conflict in Africa*, Oxford, 1959, pp. 2–3.

2 See for instance, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*, Calcutta, 1901, or *Dwijendranath Thakurer smritikatha*, in Bipinbihari Gupta, *Puratan prasanga*, Bidyabharati edition, Calcutta, 1373 (Bengali era).

3 R. Carstairs, *The Little world of an Indian District Officer*, London, 1912, p. 103 ; cf. J. C. Jack, *The Economic life of a Bengal district, a study*, Oxford, 1916, p. 53 and George H. Johnson, *The Stranger in India or three years in Calcutta*, London, 1843, Vol. 2, p. 152.

Most modern scholars, however, have neglected this interesting phenomenon. The term *daladali* is used in Bengali in a derogatory sense, to describe that tendency of fission which is supposed to be the root cause of all evil in Bengal today : industrial unrests, campus riots and political instability. One feels that this has somehow inhibited the possibility of a fruitful research on the subject.

Ralph Nicholas<sup>1</sup> was one of the first scholars who drew our attention to faction-feuds in modern rural Bengal. He has shown how factions are formed, how they function and how they are used as 'vote banks' by the political parties during election campaigns. Elsewhere, I have discussed the role that the *dals* played in Calcutta in the nineteenth century in mobilizing the Bengali *bhadralok* into modern politics.<sup>2</sup> Leonard Gordon has spoken of another type of *dals* 'small units of political action', consisting of young men, mainly students led by *dadas* ( a kinship term for elder brother, here used for the leaders of the *dals*'), which were the basic units of the revolutionary movement in Bengal in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

Historians of the older generation have for long taken a linear view of Indian history. They have looked at the history of India, more particularly the history of Bengal, since the nineteenth century, as a development from 'Indian status to British contract', if we are to borrow a phrase from Sir Henry Maine (as an American historian has done).<sup>4</sup> The history of modern Bengal is presented to us as a continuous struggle between the forces of reform and the forces of reaction. The heroes of this type of history are either the enlightened British administrators like Bentinck, who were bent upon reforms, who stamped out superstitious customs like *sati*, introduced English education and thus brought about a new social order, or the Indian reformers like

1 Ralph W. Nicholas, 'Village factions and Political parties in rural West Bengal', *Journal of Commonwealth political studies*, Vol. 2, 1963-1964, pp. 17-32.

2 See pp. 52 ff.

3 Leonard A. Gordon, 'Portrait of a Bengal Revolutionary', *Journal of Asian studies*, Vol. 27, p. 204.

4 Bernard S. Cohn, 'From Indian Status to British Contract', *Journal of economic history*, 1961.

Rammohun Roy who had to wage battles against the orthodoxy for enlightened social reforms.<sup>1</sup> This view of history is too simple to explain the many-sided complex developments of the nineteenth century. This explanation of history neglects the role of the so-called 'conservatives' in the social reform movement and fails to understand the true significance of the conflicts within the *bhadralok* society and between the *bhadralok* and the Europeans. Historians have tended to look at these conflicts through ideologically tinted glasses and they have thus given us a distorted picture.

Calcutta in the nineteenth century was a peaceful city. It was then not plagued by the periodic riots, mob-violence, and political murders, as it has been during the twentieth century. This does not mean that there was no violence in the city during the nineteenth century : in fact newspapers are full of reports of violent crimes, murders and armed robberies.<sup>2</sup> But these acts were committed by individuals or groups of gangsters, which did not threaten the stability of the social order. The *bhadralok* enjoyed a rather comfortable and peaceful life in the nineteenth century. Their hegemony was not yet challenged by the Muslim middle-classes and the tranquility of the city was not yet disturbed by a politically organized working-class or by socially alienated youths. This stability was maintained because no one who mattered in public life wanted to disturb the social order. There was cohesion within the *bhadralok* society. Although the society was segmented into castes and *dals*, and the *bhadralok* competed with one another for power and status, they were often united in societies, school committees, and political associations for united action to protect their property, and to get a better deal for the Indians or to stand against a particular Act of the government. There were many *dals* within the *bhadralok* group which would sometimes split into smaller *dals* yet at other times fuse with other *dals* for united action. This system could be

1 S. D. Collet, *The Life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (3rd. ed.), Calcutta, 1962. See editors' notes.

2 *Samachar Chandrika*, 6 August 1836 as quoted in B. N. Banerjee (ed.), *Sangbad patre sekaler katha*, (S.S.K.) Vol. 2 (3rd. ed.), Calcutta, 1356 (Bengali era), pp. 362–63.

compared with the Nuer political system, as Evans-Pritchard describes it 'an equilibrium between opposed tendencies towards fission and fusion'.<sup>1</sup> This division of society into groups with conflicting loyalties helped to maintain this equilibrium and created an atmosphere where literature and art could flourish.<sup>2</sup>

## II

Throughout this essay I shall use *bhadralok* as a generic term to describe the families who moved into Calcutta during the latter half of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries. I find that *bhadralok* is a useful analytical category. The new urban class used it to describe themselves as a distinct group separated, on the one hand, from the feudal aristocracy and the peasants of the rural areas, and on the other, from the English administrators and the urban poor of Calcutta. The men who gathered on 16 February 1823 in the Hindu College, Calcutta, to form a society to cultivate Bengali literature and culture, described their society as *gaurdesiya bhadraloker sabha* (a society of Bengali *bhadralok*).<sup>3</sup> The self image and the world view of the Bengali middle classes were largely shaped by their idea that the society in Bengal was broadly divided between *bhadralok* and *abhadralok* (*itarlok* or *chotalok*), between the cultured, rich and middling classes and the uncultured poor.<sup>4</sup> The *bhadralok* included the rich *babus* (*Abhijats*) and the *maddhyabitto* (middling class). There was also another category of *bhadralok*, *grihassthas*; Bhavanicharan Banerjee described them as *daridra, athacha bhadralok* (poor, but *bhadralok*).<sup>5</sup> It was, however,

1 E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, Oxford, 1940, pp. 147–8.

2 For a conservative view on the importance of diversity and conflicts for progress and creativeness in a society see T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the definition of culture* (paperback ed.) London, 1961.

3 *Gaurdesiya samaj sthapanartha: pratham sabhar vivaran*, Calcutta, 1229 (Bengali era), p. 27.

4 For a further discussion on the self-image of the *bhadralok* class see my article 'Bhadralok in Bengali language and literature--an essay on the language of class and status', *Bengal past and present*, Dec. 1976.

5 Bhavanicharan Banerjee, *Kalikata Kamalalaya* (reprint), Calcutta, 1343 (Bengali era), pp. 8–9.

more usual to consider *grihasta* as synonym of *maddhyabitto*. They were all dubbed together with the *abhijat* by the English officers as 'the educated natives',<sup>1</sup> to distinguish them as a group from the old nobility and the masses. In their English newspapers, the *bhadralok* described themselves as the middling class.<sup>2</sup>

The *bhadralok* status was not ascriptive, it had to be acquired, and the English-educated opulent men of Calcutta could easily move into this new aristocracy. Although the majority of the *bhadralok* came from the three high castes, Brahmīns, *Baidyas*, and *Kayasthas*, membership was open to all caste groups. Even among the founder members of the *bhadralok*'s first society in 1823, the Gauriya Samaj, there were two *Subarnavaniks*, Biresher Mallick and Kashinath Mallick.<sup>3</sup> Radhakanta Deb's first list of the 'Principal Hindoo Inhabitants of Calcutta', prepared in 1822, included at least seven families who came from *Subarnavanik*, *Tili* and weaver castes.<sup>4</sup> In fact, men who held a common position along some continuum of the economy, acquired high status through English education or administrative service or some other secular channel, and shared a common life style, became members of the *bhadralok* class. In their life style the *bhadralok* imitated the English officials and the Mughal nobility, without sacrificing high caste social values. Many caste groups like the weavers who acquired high *bhadralok* status, imitated both high class and high caste life style. The Setts of Calcutta lived ostentatiously in large houses, opened 'reading rooms' for 'the educated youth of the metropolis', established English schools and acted as justices of the peace. But they also supplied the holy water for the idols of Somnath and Dwarakanath, and established their family deity 'Radhakanta jew'<sup>5</sup> in Calcutta. According to J. N. Bhattacharya, the rich calcutta weavers gave

1 H. T. Prinsep, 'Three generations in India 1770–1904', India Office Library (I.O.L.) MSS Eur. C. 97/1.

2 *Bengal Herald*, 13 June 1829.

3 *Gaurdesiya samaj sthapanartha* etc., p. 3.

4 Foreign Miscellaneous Series, National Archives of India (F. M. S.), no. 130, ff. 113–8.

5 L. N. Ghosh, *The modern history of the Indian chiefs, Rajas, Zaminders etc.*, Calcutta, 1879–81, Vol. 2, pp. 155–7.

up the life style of their poor caste brothers in the rural areas. Like other high castes, the Setts and Basaks of Calcutta did not allow widow-remarriage and divorce, which was commonly practised by the *Tantis* of the interior.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the rich low caste groups had to gain high caste status before they could be admitted into the *bhadralok* community. Risley mentions that a *Ghulam Kayastha* (slave *Kayastha*) of East Bengal, 'could, and can even at the present day, if rich and provident, raise himself by intermarriage as high as the *Madhalaya* grade, and obtain admission among the Bhadra-lok or gentry of his countrymen'.<sup>2</sup> So high caste status and high caste life style were important to the *bhadralok*. It must however be remembered that the majority of the high caste Brahmins and *Kayasthas* did not belong to the *bhadralok* class, as they were poor, uneducated and did not share the 'middle class' life style.<sup>3</sup>

It is now generally accepted that Bengal in the pre-colonial days was largely divided into semi-autonomous chiefdoms, presided over by rajas who served kinship, religious, administrative and economic functions.<sup>4</sup> The caste system largely depended on the rajas. It seems that the caste rules in Bengal were enforced by the authority of the rajas and their *samajs*. *Samajs* were a hierarchy of social groups. According to Ram Ram Bose, Maharaja Bikramaditya invited Brahmins, *Baidyas* and *Kayasthas* from all over Bengal to settle in his chiefdom to form a *samaj*: *Brahman Kayastha, Baidya nana uttam varner basati hailo, Maharaja Bikramaditya samajpati Jasahore mahasamaj hailo, emata samaj aar Banglay, kakhano chilo na*. ('Brahmin, *Kayastha*, *Baidya*, various high castes established themselves, Maharaja Bikramaditya became the *samajpati* of Jessore, the great *samaj* came in-

- 1 J. N. Bhattacharya, *Hindu castes and sects*, reprint, Calcutta, 1968, p. 185.
- 2 H. H. Risley, *Tribes and castes of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1891, Vol. 1, p. 440.
- 3 For the profession of the Brahmins in Calcutta in the early nineteenth century see W. Ward, *A view of the history, literature and mythology of the Hindoos*, London, 1817-20, Vol. 3, p. 88 n. It is interesting to note that according to 1921 census the majority of the Brahmins and *Kayasthas* of Calcutta were not educated in English, hence were not a part of the *elite* group. *Census of Calcutta, 1921, report*, Pt. 1, pp. 87-9.
- 4 Ronald Inden, 'The Hindu Chiefdom in Middle Bengal Literature', in Edward C. Dimock (ed.), *Bengal, literature and history*, Chicago, 1967.



to being. There was no such *samaj* anywhere else in Bengal').<sup>1</sup> Bharat Chandra Roy described Krishnachandra, the Maharaja of Nawadwip, as a great *samajpati*, and the poet compared his patron's *samaj* with that of Indra, the King of the gods.<sup>2</sup> No doubt there were in Bengal many intraregional and inter-regional caste *panchayats*, especially among the lower and the merchant castes, which settled caste disputes.<sup>3</sup> But it appears that the majority of the caste cases were settled by the rajas and their *samajs*. Like the *nads* of pre-colonial Kerala,<sup>4</sup> most social ties were vertical to the rajas and *samajs*. We must not, however, exaggerate the lack of spatial mobility and regional isolation in pre-colonial Bengal. The literary evidence shows that most poets and authors travelled widely,<sup>5</sup> and all Bengali *samajs* accepted the rule of *smriti* and Raghunandan. Moreover, some *samajs* had higher authorities than others, for instance the *Nawadwip Samaj* which largely consisted of the *Bharadwaj gotra* of *Paschetya Baidiki* Brahmins, was well respected throughout Bengal for their knowledge of the *shastras* and the *navyanyay* logic.<sup>6</sup> It is widely believed that the *Baidya* raja Rajballava tried, in the eighteenth century, to introduce widow remarriage and sought unsuccessfully the support of the *Nawadwip Samaj* and the Maharaja of Krishnagar.<sup>7</sup> Again, when the Tagores wanted to be recognised as *Kulins* they looked to the Maharaja

1 Ram Ram Bose, *Pratapaditya charit*, Serampore, 1801, pp. 45–6

2 Bharat Chandra Roy, *Annada Mangal* in *Bharatchandra granthavali*, Calcutta, 1369 (Bengali era), p. 11.

3 Ronald Inden, *op. cit.* p. 30. Cf. *Census of India 1921 report*, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, p. 393.

4 Eric Millar, 'Caste and territory in Malabar'. *The American anthropologist*, 1954, no. 56, pp. 410–20.

5 For the life of Bharat Chandra Roy see Madanmuhon Goswami, *Bharat Chandra*, Delhi, 1961, and for the autobiographies of two other authors of pre-colonial Bengal see G. Whyte Kilpatrick, 'Two autobiographical accounts from Middle Bengali Literature', in Dimock *op. cit.* pp. 47–66.

6 Risley, *op. cit.* Vol. 2, p. 132.

7 This story about Rajballava's attempts to introduce social reform in Bengal had been told in most biographies and memoirs of the nineteenth century, but the earliest account of it appeared in print in Kartik Chandra Roy's *Kshitish Vamsavali*. See C. C. Banerjee, *Vidyasagar*, Allahabad, 1909, p. 227.

of Krishnagar for support.<sup>1</sup> According to Shivanath Shastri, most printed almanacks and religious texts in the nineteenth century claimed that they were written under the patronage of the Maharajas of Krishnagar.<sup>2</sup> Most *samajs* were not as influential as Nawadwip was, but within their own territories the rajas were the supreme arbiters in caste cases. The rajas, if we are to believe the literature, vied with one another to bring reputable Brahmins and other high castes into their chiefdoms.

The establishment of a new thriving urban centre in Calcutta under the British protection created new problems, and it undermined the authority of the old *samajs*. There was no single arbiter of caste laws in Calcutta. This was not however a problem peculiar to Calcutta. Dobbin has recently described the disruption in the traditional methods of regulating caste affairs through caste *panchayats* in Bombay city in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Kumar has also spoken of the changing role of caste assemblies in urban Maharashtra in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In Calcutta, *jatimala cutcherries* were established in the early days of the Company; we do not however know the exact date of their foundation. The *cutcherries* received some official sanction, and according to Warren Hastings the 'chief *mutsudys* or, *banyas* of the governors of Calcutta' were appointed to preside over them. Thus during the second half of the eighteenth century Nubkissen, Ganga Gobind Singh and Cantoo Babu acted as 'presidents' of the *cutcherries*.<sup>5</sup> According to Verelst<sup>6</sup> the jurisdictions of the *cutcherries* were universal (it is interesting to note that the *cutcherries* were always mentioned in the plural). Edmund Burke also believed it to be so, and he charged Warren Hastings for

1 J. N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.* p. 99.

2 Shivanath Shastri, *Ramtoonu Lahiri o tatkalin Banga samaj* (3rd. ed.), Calcutta, 1909, p. 2.

3 C. Dobbin, 'The Parsi Panchayat in Bombay City in the nineteenth century', *Modern Asian studies*, Vol. 4, 1970, pp. 149-164.

4 R. Kumar, 'The new Brahmans of Maharashtra', in D. A. Low (ed.) *Soundings in modern South Asian history*, London, 1968, pp. 96-7.

5 Select Secret Proceedings, May 1775, as quoted in *Census of India 1911 report*, Vol. 1, part 1, p. 395.

6 Harry Verelst, *A view of the rise, progress and present state of the English in Bengal*, London 1772, pp. 27-8 n.

putting 'the caste and character of all the people of Bengal'<sup>1</sup> in the hands of his servants. But it is most unlikely that the *jati-mala cutcherries* had any jurisdiction outside Calcutta and among the higher castes in Bengal. In fact, according to Warren Hastings they had 'cognizance only of disputes among the lower kinds of the people'.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the high castes settled their disputes through *dals* and the caste *cutcherries* lost their importance in the nineteenth century.

It is not quite clear when the *dals* started. It is, however, clear that they were already present when Nubkissen moved into Calcutta in the middle of the eighteenth century. It is believed that there were two *dals* in Calcutta, one led by Madan Mohun Datta and the other by Kristo Churan Mitra.<sup>3</sup> According to the *Samachar Darpan* 'nearly all the people of the town were subjects'<sup>4</sup> to these two *dalapatis*. Nubkissen belonged to Mitra's *dal*. Although a *Maulik Kayastha* by birth, he soon became the leader of Mitra's *dal* and under his leadership it grew in number and influence. Soon Nubkissen was recognized as the *goshthipati* of the *Dakshin Radi Kayasthas* of Bengal.

His own nineteenth-century official biographer considered this as his greatest achievement: 'Navakrishna's social importance was perhaps greater even than his political. All his other glories were outshone by the glory which attached to the chief of the Hindoo community of Calcutta...in the social kingdom of his city he was the very monarch. As he owed his fortune to his own enterprise, sagacity and genius, so his social pre-eminence was purely of his own acquiring.'<sup>5</sup>

He had that uncommon ability for leadership, ability to command respect from men under him. His immense wealth, a large number of economic dependents and kinsmen (nephews, cousins and other relations), and his official position must have weighed heavily in his favour, in the fight for leadership of his

1 *Census of India 1911 report*, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, p. 394.

2 Select Secret Proceedings, March 1775, as quoted in *Census of India 1911*, p. 395.

3 N.N. Ghose, *op. cit.* p. 204.

4 *Samachar Darpan*, 24 September 1831.

5 N.N. Ghose, *op. cit.* p. 171.

*dal*. He modelled himself after the traditional *rajas*.<sup>1</sup> He invited high class *Kulins* to settle in Calcutta and helped them with funds. He also patronized Brahmin pandits as a *raja* should do. Such important pandits as Jagannath Tarkapanchanan, Vanesvar Vidyalkar, and Radhakanta Tarkabagish were all indebted to him. He gave them land and house properties in and outside Calcutta.<sup>2</sup>

He patronized the *ghataks* (match-makers) and with their aid he raised his own social status by marrying his grandson Radhakanta Deb into a high caste *Kulin Kayastha* family<sup>3</sup> and maintained disciplines within his own *dal*. The *ghataks* had an unusual hold over the high caste Bengali society for centuries. Their chief function was to select appropriate matches. For this they kept registers of pedigrees, of marriages, of important social events and decided the social status of the *Kulas* (families). George Johnson described them as 'men of a fawning and flattering disposition', who in the 'assemblies of the Hindoos' would 'often panegyryze some individual as for his giving them a few rupees, as they would satirize him for not listening to their adulation. They sometimes involve parties in difficulties by getting up matches of a disreputable character'.<sup>4</sup> Risley, however, was impressed by their remarkable memory, some of the *ghataks* could offhand 'repeat the names of all members of the main as well as collateral branches of any family in his particular part of the country ; of the families with which they have married, and of the issue of such marriages'.<sup>5</sup> He also mentioned that bribes were often offered to the *ghataks* by rich families to establish a claim to high social status, but were rarely accepted :

1 *Ibid* p. 190.

2 N. N. Ghose in his memoirs gives an eulogistic description of Nubkissen's *Sabha* : 'Maharaja Nubkissen was the Maccenas of Bengal. There never was in this province a more munificent or more enthusiastic patron of letters and the fine arts. His home was the favourite resort of men of learning. His *sabha* (Association) of pundits was pre-eminently the first in the land. It has been popularly compared to the famous council of Vikramaditya.' p 184.

3 *A rapid sketch of the life of Raja Radhakanta Deb Bahadur*, Calcutta, 1859, p. 17.

4 George Johnson, *op. cit.* p. 279.

5 H. H. Risley, *The Tribes and castes of Bengal*, Vol. 1, p. 279.

'Disputes, however, are common, and the *ghataks* who favour a claim that is fallacious, and who attend at an unauthorized marriage, fall in the estimation of those who have questioned its soundness and declined to be present. The scruples of a single *pradhan ghatak* often mar the otherwise perfect satisfaction of a parent on the marriage of his son to a family of higher rank than his own ; and should all the leaders unite in forbidding the marriage, it is impossible to win any permanent promotion beyond that laid down in their registers.'<sup>1</sup> Whatever might have been the moral character of the *ghataks* as a class, there was no doubt that they had considerable power over the society. Nubkissen, as their patron, got the *Kayastha Kulagrantha* (it may be considered a digest of all family registers), recorded systematically, and exerted considerable influence over the *Kayastha* caste. The crowning social event of his life was *ekjai*, where the ranks of the *Kulins* were determined and Nubkissen was declared the *goshthipati* of his caste in West Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

The chief function of the *dalapati* was to preserve caste, lives, and religion of his *dal*. It was suggested that heads of different *dals* should 'like kings use their utmost endeavours to keep carefully the members of their *dals* [within the holy path]. For example, if any man through vicious inclination eat what is not to be eaten, or drink what is not to be drunk, and this becomes known, then the leader of a *dal* immediately gives notice to the members of his party, that such a person is fallen, and they are to have no intercourse with him or, if a man become fallen through a false accusation, he may beg of the leader of a *dal* to restore him into his *dal*, and he on careful investigation of the charges, finding him innocent may take him into his *dal*, and so on'.<sup>3</sup> Nubkissen must have had considerable experience as an arbiter of caste cases in the caste *cutcherries* and many men looked to him for guidance in social intercourse.

According to Bhavani Charan Banerjee<sup>4</sup> members of the *dals* had to consult the *dalapatis* on such occasions as birth of a

1 *Ibid.* pp. 279–80.

2 N. N. Ghose, *op. cit.* pp. 173–4.

3 *Samachar Darpan*, 24 Sept. 1831.

4 Bhavani Charan Banerjee, *op. cit.* pp. 30–1.

child, marriage, and *sradh*. *Dalapatis* used to draw up lists of invitees, so many Brahmins, so many *adhyapaks*, and so on, according to the financial ability of the member, and keeping out those who were blacklisted and must be ostracized. Members were not allowed to have any social intercourse with those who had been officially ostracized by their *dalapati*. In the large houses of the *dalapatis* members used to visit upon their leaders to finalize arrangements for marriages, *sradhs* and other family ceremonies.

The *dal* was important to Nubkissen, it gave him a high status within his caste and amongst the *bhadralok* in Calcutta and leadership over men whom he could control and mobilize. The *dalapatis* had also taken over another function of the *rajas*, they were patrons of the arts. The official biographer praised Nubkissen for introducing into Calcutta society nautch, *kabi* and *akhrai*.<sup>1</sup> His nautch parties attracted many Europeans. Hickey described one in *The Bengal Gazette* :

'On Monday night Rajah Nubkissen gave a nautch and magnificent entertainment to several persons of distinction in commemoration of Miss Wrangham's birthday. As the ladies arrived, they were conducted by the Rajah through a grand suite of apartments into the zenana, where they were amused until the singing began, which was so mellifluous as to give every face a smile of approbation. The surprising agility of one of the male dancers occasioned loud acclamations of applause....After supper there was a ball, which was opened by Mr Livius and Miss Wrangham, who were dressed in the character of Apollo and Daphne. When the minuets were ended, country dance struck up and continued till past three in the morning, when the company departed highly pleased with the elegant festival. As the Rajah was attending Miss Wrangham to carriage, he thanked her in very polite terms for having illuminated his house with her brightness.'<sup>2</sup>

### III

By the turn of the century many high caste new families moved

1 N. N. Ghose. *op. cit.* p. 186.

2 *Hickey's Bengal Gazette*, 25 August 1781, as quoted in N.N. Ghose, *op. cit.* p. 184.

into Calcutta and it was not possible for the two original multi-caste *dals* to control all the new members of the *bhadralok* class. There appeared a large number of new *dals*. The wealthy *abhi-jats* provided the leadership. There were already some single caste *dals* especially amongst the *Subarnavaniks*. The Mullick family of Pathuriaghata and Chorebagan had their own *dal*. According to L. N. Ghose 'This family was of great antiquity, sprung from the Subarna Banik caste or the Banker caste of Bengal, whose profession by national custom is confined to banking and mercantile business. The Mullicks have been renowned for their wealth, enterprise, and munificence from immemorial times. So great has been the weight of their social position, that they have been recognized as the Dolopaties or the head of a large number of families of their castes.'<sup>1</sup> The membership of their *dal* was restricted to dependents and kinsmen, who benefited both economically and socially : 'The descendants of many near relatives and dependents up to this day enjoy the benefits formerly rendered and remember them with gratitude. As Dolopati they introduced several reforms amongst their kinsmen, and saved many from ex-communication of caste or other social degradation.'<sup>2</sup> There was at least another *dal* of the *Subarnavaniks*, one of their leaders, Nimai Charan Mullick of Burra Bazar, was selected as the Chairman of *Dharma Sabha* in 1830.<sup>3</sup>

According to Bhavani Charan Banerjee<sup>4</sup> all other castes of Calcutta, Brahmin, *Baidya*, *Kayastha*, *Kamar*, *Kumor*, *Tili*, *Mali*, *Sankhari*, *Kansavanik*, *Tantubay* etc. belonged to various multi-caste *dals* which came into existence from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Many castes, like the *Tilis*, had their own single caste *dals*, where purely internal caste matters were discussed. Most, however, belonged to both single caste *dals* and the large multi-caste *dals*. Most *dalapatis* of the large multi-caste *dals* were *Kayasthas*, *Dakshin Radis* like Radhakanta Deb, Ashutosh Deb (Dey) and Shivnarayan Ghosh or *Uttar Radis*,

1 L. N. Ghose, *The Modern history of the Indian chiefs ...*, Vol. 2, p. 51.

2 *Ibid.* p. 59.

3 *Ibid.* p. 68.

4 Bhavani Charan Banerjee, *op. cit.* p. 33.

like the family of Ganga Govind Singh, or *Bangajas*, like Kalinath Munshi. There were, however, many Brahmin *dalapatis* like Biswanath Motilal and the Tagores.<sup>1</sup>

It is almost impossible to find out the exact number of *dals* in Calcutta during the first half of the nineteenth century. Many *dals* like the one of the Debs had a long life, it started in the eighteenth century with Nubkissen and continued to function, if only as a social faction of the *Dakshin Radi Kayastha* families of Calcutta, well into the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> There were, however, many *dals* which grew around a rich *dalapati* like Ashutosh Deb (Dey), which did not last much beyond the death of the patron.<sup>3</sup> There were yet other *dals* like the one of the Dattas of Hatkhola, which played a significant role in the eighteenth century but receded into the background in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Although it is not possible to get the exact figure for the total number of *dals*, it was generally agreed that there were about five big *dals* in Calcutta between 1820 and 1850. These were led by Radhakanta Deb, Ashutosh Deb (Dey), the Tagores, Biswanath Motilal and Kalinath Munshi.<sup>5</sup> There were many small *dals* led by Shivnarayn Ghosh, Ganga Govind Singh's family, Nilkamal Banerjee and many others.<sup>6</sup> The figures for the memberships of these *dals* are not available. But we know that Navinkrishna Singha had 117 *Tili* families and about 50 Brahmin families in his *dal*. There was, however, a small number of *Kayasthas* in this *dal*.<sup>7</sup>

1 *Samachar Darpan*, 5 August 1837, *S S.K.* Vol. 2, p. 274.

2 N.N. Ghose. *op. cit.* p. 191.

3 Ashutosh Deb started his *dal* in 1833 and was very active in the 40s and 50s of the century, but soon after his death his *dal* was never mentioned again. *Samachar Darpan*, 5 January 1833, *S S K* Vol. 2, pp. 271 – 2. Cf. *Dwijendranath Thakurer smritikatha, Puratan prasanga*, pp 285 – 6.

4 N. N. Ghose, *op. cit.* p. 204. Cf. *Samachar Darpan*, 24 September 1831.

5 *Samachar Darpan*, 9 July 1831. Cf. Bhavani Charan Banerjee, *op. cit.* p. 29.

6 *Samachar Darpan*, 5 August 1837, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, pp. 273 – 5. In Baranagar there were five *dalapatis*: Pran-nath Chowdhury, Joynarayan Bandyopadhyay, Durgacharan Mukhopadhyay, Ram Ratan Roy and Kalinath Munshi. See letter to the Editor, *Samachar Chandrika*, as reprinted in *Samachar Darpan*, 6 August 1831.

7 Letter to the Editor, *Samachar Chandrika*, 24 December 1831, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, pp. 266 – 7.



Radhakanta Deb probably had the largest *dal* in Calcutta. He enlisted the support of the most learned Brahmins and the important *Dakshin Radi Kayastha* families of Calcutta. In the 1840s when *Dharma Sabha* became a mere caste tribunal and a front organization of Deb's *dal*, *Samachar Chandrika* used to publish the proceedings of the *Sabha* regularly. It seems that at every meeting the *dalapati* used to give *vyavasthas* on about 200 petitions on caste cases and *dans* (gifts to Brahmins).<sup>1</sup> If this is any indication of his strength then the membership of his *dal* must have run into thousands and his influence was not restricted to a particular area in Calcutta.

As the number of *dals* increased, it was thought useful to bring out a newspaper solely devoted to the transactions of the *dals*. This was to be called *Dalabrittanta*. The prospectus for this paper appeared in *Samachar Darpan* and in *Samachar Chandrika*.<sup>2</sup>

It was suggested that publication of the transactions of the *dals* would help to discipline the members of the *dals*. Such a newspaper would help the *dalapatis*. When some Srimani's widowed sister-in-law ran away with a sailor<sup>3</sup> or some Madhusudan Mitra's second son was married off to a girl of wrong caste,<sup>4</sup> the *dalapatis* could print such facts and the *vyavasthas* on such issues in the newspaper and could make it that much harder for Srimani and Madhusudan Mitra to get back to their respective castes, because of the wide publicity. Thus newspapers could be used to control men by the *dalapatis*. The *Dalabrittanta* did not get beyond its prospectus, but the activities of the *dals* were regularly published in the newspapers, more particularly in *Samachar Chandrika*.

There was keen competition amongst the five great *dals* to gain high status and control over men and matter in Calcutta. Two *dals* were more important than the others, one led by the

1 See *Samachar Chandrika*, especially 8 June 1843, 23 November 1843, 4 February 1844 and 6 October 1845.

2 *Samachar Darpan*, 24 September 1831.

3 Letter to the Editor, *Samachar Chandrika*, as reprinted in *Samachar Darpan*, 24 December 1831. S.S.K. Vol. 2, pp. 266–7.

4 *The Bengal Spectator*, 1 September 1842, as reprinted in Benoy Ghosh (ed.), *Samayikpatre Banglar samajchitra* (S.B.S.) Vol. 3, Calcutta, 1964, pp. 96–100.

Debs and the other by the Tagores. High caste status was important to these families. The Debs were *Kayasthas* but *Maulik Kayasthas*; the Tagores were Brahmins, but had lost their *Kulin* rank and were considered as stained or degraded Brahmins. The Debs were recognized as *goshthipatis* of the *Dakshin Radi Kayasthas* and received high *Kulin* status, since the *ekjai* of Nubkissen. The Tagores had to struggle hard. In the eighteenth century, when they first moved into Calcutta, there were not many Brahmin residents, hence the Tagores, despite their low grade position, were recognized as high caste Brahmins, by the low caste residents of the city. But when they became wealthy and influential, Durgacharan Mukherjee of Bagbazar formed a party for degrading the Tagores. In this he was helped by the *Kayastha* magnates of Calcutta. The Tagores were extremely proud of their Brahminhood, they displayed their sacred thread openly and claimed high status from others.<sup>1</sup> Gnanendra Nath Tagore, who embraced Christianity, called himself a 'Brahmin Christian'.<sup>2</sup> They were disliked for this by the *Baidyas* and *Kayasthas* of Calcutta.<sup>3</sup>

The Tagores employed *ghataks*<sup>4</sup> who re-wrote their family-histories in the nineteenth century and helped to obtain high caste Brahmin brides and bridegrooms for their children. Prasanna-kumar Tagore got his daughter married off to a high caste *Naikasya Kulin* bridegroom.<sup>5</sup> If Ward is to be believed then the Tagores tried to bribe the Maharaja of Krishnagar and the *Nawadwip Samaj* with a lac of rupees, so that they could be received as a high *Kulin* Brahmin.<sup>6</sup> It was also suggested that by the end of the nineteenth century Sir J. M. Tagore was 'on the way towards acquiring an influence on the pandits which may one day enable him to re-establish his family completely in caste'.<sup>7</sup>

1 L. N. Ghose, *op cit.* pp. 165–6.

2 Rajnarayan Bose, *Atmcharit*, Calcutta, 1315 (Bengali era), pp. 112–3.

3 Umeschandra Datter *smritikatha* in Bipin Bihari Gupta, *Puratan prasangha*, pp. 179–80.

4 *A brief account of the Tagore family*, Calcutta, 1868, p. 5.

5 *Samachar Darpan*, 25 February 1832.

6 W Ward, *A view of the history etc.* as mentioned in J. N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.* p. 99.

7 *Ibid.*

The nucleus of a *dal* was one of the rich and old established families, and *dalapatis* were senior members of such families. The most important members of a *dal* were the kinsmen and friends of the *dalapati*. However, it would be a mistake to think of the families as united groups. For instance the Debs were broadly divided between the senior and junior branches. The junior branch generally accepted the leadership of the senior branch and worked with them in the *Dharma Sabha*. But in 1844 they broke away to form their own *dal*.<sup>1</sup> The Tagores were even less united, there were at least three distinct groups, one led by Gopi Mohun Tagore and his son Prasannakumar Tagore, the second by Dwarkanath Tagore and the third by Umananda Tagore who really belonged to Deb's *dal*.<sup>2</sup>

Often *dals* used to split into smaller *dals*. Sometimes this would be so because of family feuds. In fact, according to Carstairs *daladali* was an extension of family feuds : 'There was hardly a family of position without its feud. There is a saying in India that one generation makes a family, the second carries it on, and the third breaks it up.'<sup>3</sup> But most Calcutta *dals* split because a rich member would decide to break with his *dalapati*, to form his own *dal*, to carve out an area of power and influence. In 1833, Ashutosh Deb formed his own *dal* and broke away from the Dattas of Hatkhola.<sup>4</sup> Biswanath Motilal's *dal* was also a breakaway group.<sup>5</sup> According to Bhavani Charan Banerjee, 'when a rich member disagrees he forms his own *dal*, but when a poor member disagrees he has to look for a new *dalapati*.'<sup>6</sup>

The primary function of a *dal* was to settle disputes concerning caste, inheritance, marriage, caste rank and intercaste relationships. Thus *dals* would decide whether or not the second brother of Navakumar Mukherjee of Jahanabad,<sup>7</sup> should be deprived of his ancestral property, because he had been living

1 *Samachar Chandrika*, 1 August 1844.

2 *Samachar Chandrika*, 13 February 1830, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, pp. 306-7.

3 R. Carstairs, *op. cit.* p. 98.

4 *Samachar Chandrika*, 5 January 1833. *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, pp. 271-2.

5 Letter to the Editor, *Samachar Darpan*, 5 August 1837.

6 Bhavani Charan Banerjee, *op. cit.* p. 30.

7 *Samachar Chandrika*, 5 July 1830 Cf. *Alexander's East India Magazine*, Vol. 1, pp. 403-4.

with a *chandal* (untouchable) woman. They could give *vyavasthas* on the caste status of a *Tili* gentleman called Srimani,<sup>1</sup> whose sister-in-law ran away with a sailor, or of Madhusudan Mitra,<sup>2</sup> who married his son to a girl of wrong caste. It seems that *dals* spent most of their time in discussions on problems of individuals who strayed away from 'the holy path', ate wrong food or married into wrong castes or had social intercourse with persons who should be ostracized. It was usual to leave the final decisions on such cases to the *dalapatis*, who gave *vyavasthas* after consulting the Brahmins.<sup>3</sup> There were, however, cases where special meetings of the pandits were called to give *vyavasthas* on such difficult problems as inter-caste relationships. In 1832, Bhavani Charan Banerjee called a meeting of pandits to decide whether a *Vaisnava* Shudra could command reverence from Brahmins.<sup>4</sup>

There were many other disputes on property and on inheritance which were settled by the *dalapatis*. According to Dwijendranath Tagore his grandfather and father 'ruled the society' (*samaj sasan*) as *dalapatis* and settled many disputes between the members of the *dal*, which would usually be decided in the twentieth century in a court of law.<sup>5</sup> In 1845 a dispute arose between Motilal Seal and Ananda Narayan Ghosh, over the jurisdiction of their respective *bazars*. They failed to settle their case, so, on 2 March 1845, many *abhijats* gathered in Prasannakumar Tagore's house to mediate in this dispute, but Ghosh refused to accept them as arbiters.<sup>6</sup> In the end Seal's *lathials* (armed retainers) clashed with those of Ghosh and evicted the latter's Ananda Bazar. Such use of force was condoned by Seal's nineteenth-century biographer K. C. Mittra. Mittra blamed the corrupt police force : 'It was accustomed to collude with crime rather than to punish it. It was the terror not of evil doers but of peaceful and honest

1 Letter to the Editor, *Samachar Chandrika*, as reprinted in *Samachar Darpan*, 24 December 1831, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, pp. 266–7.

2 *The Bengal Spectator*, 1 September 1842, *S.B.S.* Vol. 3, pp. 96–100.

3 *Samachar Chandrika* of 1830–1 and 1844–5.

4 *Biprabhakti Chandrika*, Calcutta 1832, as reprinted in N. N. Law, *Subarnavanik, katha o kirti*, Calcutta, 1940, Vol. 1, pp. 40–50.

5 Dwijendranath Thakurer *smritikatha*, p. 285.

6 *Samachar Chandrika*, 3 March 1845.

men. The law being too weak to protect the right of individuals, was broken by both parties.<sup>1</sup> Most *bhadralok* had armed retainers and private prisons, as the zamindars had in the villages. They were often used to subdue men like the editor of *Bhaskar*<sup>2</sup> who would not co-operate, or to settle disputes with other *abhijats*. Private armed retainers were also used to put down the lower order, when they got out of hand and rioted. This often happened during the *pūja* celebrations or the *śradh* ceremonies, when large numbers (sometimes as many as 50,000) of poor people were fed by the rich *abhijats*.<sup>3</sup> There was not much respect for the police; Dwijendranath recalled how, on one occasion, he and his friends assaulted a police constable, and was never troubled by the authorities for this.<sup>4</sup>

The disputes between the *bhadralok* and the lower order were not always settled by the use of force. Most artisan caste groups like *kumor* (potter), *mayra* (confectioner) and Muslim *darjis* (tailors) had long established patron-client relationship with the *dalapatis*. This relationship was determined by caste and custom. Then there was the large army of domestics, who were even more closely tied to the *abhijat* families. The relationship between the *bhadralok* and the class of producers, the dockers, the builders, and other wage-earners in the new service industries was contractual and economic. But although the Oriya palankin bearers could strike or the upcountry washermen could press for higher wages,<sup>5</sup> the lower order was fragmented and consisted of migrant labourers from various parts of the sub-continent. They could not organize themselves to wage a class struggle against the *bhadralok*. Hence it is not surprising to see that, except for the occasional riots, Calcutta was a peaceful city.

#### IV

The *dals* allowed the *abhijat bhadralok* to carve out an area of influence for themselves, and gave them organization to compete

1 K.C. Mitra, *Mutylal Seal*, Calcutta, 1869, p. 17.

2 *The Bengal Spectator*, 1 February, 1843, *S. B. S.* Vol. 3, pp. 135–6.

3 Sterling to Raja Baidyanath, 17 June 1829, *F.M.S.* Vol. 158, D.O. Letter.

4 Dwijendranath Thakurer *smritikatha*, p. 281.

5 *Samachar Darpan*, 21 August 1819 and 2 June 1827, *S.S.K.* Vol. 1, pp. 171, 344–5. Cf. *Samachar Chandrika*, 12 May 1830. \*

for power and status. This competition was often very fierce. In another context I have described this competition among the elites to gain high status and to control men and matter in the city through the *dals* as politics conducted through a traditional idiom.<sup>1</sup> The *dals* were, however, very active in what one might call politics through modern idiom. Under the British-India system, as it operated in the first half of the nineteenth century, the *bhadralok* could not aspire for a very high position in public life. They could, however, sit as jurors on the Grand and Petty Juries, or work as Justices of the Peace and have some say in the running of the local government in Calcutta or they could be selected as deputy collectors of revenue or they could be given similar high positions in the Revenue and Judicial Department.

The men who were selected for such positions were considered as the representatives of 'the native public opinion'. They were the men whose names appeared in that exclusive list of 'eminent and loyal natives', which are now preserved among the Foreign Miscellaneous Series of the National Archives of India.<sup>2</sup> It would seem that the British continued the government through patronage; they acted the way the Grand Mughal would have liked. The Secretary of the Persian Department<sup>3</sup> determined the ranks of the natives, doled out titles and *khelats* to prominent men and decided on the etiquette to be observed in court. The Secretary also decided on such quaint problems as how to address a Maharaja, whether the Maharaja of Burdwan would be allowed to dress his peons with bells and badges, and whether the governor-general should accept presents from visiting native princes.

To represent 'the native public opinion' the *dalapatis* had to be involved in the area of public activities which were not directly controlled by the government. This was the field of 'public welfare' and social reform. There was keen competition to control the School Book Society, the School Society, the Committee of Managers of the Hindu College and later of other schools. Here the *bhadralok* could exercise considerable power, influen-

1 See p. 2.

2 F.M.S. Vols. 130 and 131.

3 F.M.S. Vol. 9, p. 603 and Vol. 157. D. O. Letter.

cing the policies of such institutions, appointing and sacking teachers, nominating students for scholarships, and controlling the finance. The leading members of these committees and societies, and owners and editors of newspapers would be invited to tea parties at the Bishop of Calcutta's house or at the receptions at the Government House. So long as politics remained informal and one of patronage, the *dals* worked in harmony with the British-India administrative system.<sup>1</sup>

*Daladali* was very strong in the twenties and also during the early thirties. Many men were alarmed by the activities of the *dals*. Some gloomy prophet suggested that *daladali* 'will soon destroy the very fabric of the Bengali Hindu society'.<sup>2</sup> *The Bengal Spectator*<sup>3</sup> condemned the system for creating dissension within the community and for breaking up families. With reference to the case of Madhusudan Mitra, the Editor wrote : 'There is no language strong enough to condemn a man who creates dissension between father and son, between husband and wife, so that he could strengthen the position of his dal.' Iswar Chandra Gupta of *Sangbad Prabhakar*<sup>4</sup> echoed similar views.

There was a time when it looked as though the *bhadralok* society was going to be polarized between the so-called 'Reformers' and the so-called 'Conservatives'. In 1828 Rammohun Roy established his *Brahmo Samaj*, in 1829 Bentinck prohibited *sati*, in 1830 *Dharma Sabha* was formed and in 1831 'the Young Bengal' opened their attacks not only on the idolatrous Hindus but also on the 'half-hearted liberals' like Prasannakumar Tagore, who, despite his professed faith in monotheism performed the annual *Durga Puja* with all the pomp and ceremony that was required of him as a leading *bhadralok* of Calcutta.<sup>5</sup>

One observer, writing in 1845, described the Bengali society in Calcutta as a community divided into four *dals*, the Missionary *dal*, *Nastik dal* (agnostic members of the Young Bengal), *Brahmo dal*, and the *Dharma Sabha dal*. They were not *dals* in the sense

1 See pp. 44-6.

2 Letter to the Editor, *Samachar Chandrika*, 22 July 1845.

3 *The Bengal Spectator*, 1 September 1842, *S.B.S.* Vol. 3, p. 99.

4 *Sangbad Prabhakar*, 5 September 1850 (?), *S.B.S.* Vol. 2, pp. 174-5.

5 *Samachar Darpan*, 22 October 1831.

we have described them earlier. They were not social factions formed primarily to function as a caste tribunal. If we leave out the Young Bengal and the Missionaries, they functioned as a modern pressure group would ; we can describe the other two *dals* as an amalgam of various *dals*, performing both traditional and modern duties. A correspondent to the *Samachar Darpan* wrote, 'There are many holy, honourable and wealthy persons in Bengal, but from their attachment to different *dals* there was no likelihood of bringing them together. Of late the Editor of the *Chandrika* by his great efforts has produced a union of all on the subject of suttees and established a holy society, by which we expect the opponents of our religion will easily be subdued'.<sup>1</sup> The union was formed against another group of *dals* led by the Tagores, who supported Bentinck and Rammohun Roy. *Dharma Sabha* declared war on Rammohun Roy and the *sati-dvesis* (those who opposed *sati*). The Bengali Brahmins and *adhyapaks* were urged to boycott the *dalapatis* who supported Rammohun Roy. It was stated in *Samachar Darpan* that Roy's friends were 'expelled from all Hindoo society in Calcutta ; that they are not to be united hereafter to any festival, marriage or funeral, that any brahman who may accept of an invitation and, a fee from them will be considered as lying under the same disabilities. Thus they are at once cut off from all farther intercommunity with the aristocracy of Calcutta.'<sup>2</sup>

Most priests of Calcutta ignored the decree of *Dharma Sabha*, and accepted presents from the *sati-dvesis* and performed ritual duties in their houses. But then they would go back to Deb's *dal* and repent for accepting such presents from infidels and ask to be restored back to their old positions. However, it seems from the newspaper accounts the excommunication was nearly complete, and the community was polarized. There were petitions and counterpetitions, attacks and counterattacks. Some of the comments in the newspapers were very nasty and very personal ; Rammohun Roy was satirized on various occasions and comments were made about his supposed liaison with a Muslim lady in Calcutta. The 'Reformers' hit back : 'I have seen orthodox

1 *Samachar Darpan*, 1 October 1831.

2 *Samachar Darpan*, 2 July 1831.



babus shut their ears when the very name of beef is pronounced in their presence. How then is it that they celebrate the Doorga Pooja with beefsteaks [sic], mutton chops, veal, brandy champagne [sic], sherry and all sorts of liquors and spirits.’<sup>1</sup>

There was a keen competition to gain influence over men in Calcutta and obtain recognition from the Government as the sole authority on caste. The Debs wanted to use *Dharma Sabha* as the most important caste tribunal in Bengal. In 1831 there was a bitter debate in the newspapers on the loss of property, for persons who had lost their caste. *Samachar Chandrika* claimed that *Dharma Sabha* was the ‘government of caste’ in Bengal ; as a proof they cited *Samachar Darpan*.<sup>2</sup> In the pages of *Darpan* the Missionaries put a number of questions to *Dharma Sabha*, concerning loss of caste and loss of property. *Darpan*, however, denied that they had acknowledged *Dharma Sabha*’s authority on caste matters : ‘Had we committed such an error as to acknowledge *Dharma Sabha* in this case we should have exposed ourselves to the ridicule of our readers. No one can be called the ‘Lord of Caste’, but he who possesses the power of government. Supposing for instance some native gentleman to engage in practices forbidden by the Hindoo Shastras, and to refuse to make the required propitiation, he then becomes an out-cast, and forfeits his ancestral property ; but the *Dharma Sabha* has not the power of enforcing this penalty. All that they can do is to complain of him to the sovereign of the country and it is for the sovereign and sovereign alone, to inflict the punishment.’<sup>3</sup> However, the struggle to get *Dharma Sabha* recognized as the caste tribunal of Bengal continued in the forties and fifties of the century.<sup>4</sup>

There was also keen competition to control schools and other ‘public welfare’ societies. The Debs and their *dal* controlled most school committees including Hindu College; they managed to keep Rammohun Roy and his close associates out of these

1 *Samachar Darpan*, 5 November 1831.

2 *Samachar Chandrika*, 30 July 1831, as quoted in *Samachar Darpan*.

3 *Samachar Darpan*, 6 August 1831.

4 George Johnson, *op. cit.* Vol. 2, p. 152.

committees. Gopi Mohun Tagore and his son Prasannakumar, however, managed to get a foothold in them.

During this period of sharp division of opinion and bitter conflicts, there appeared many new associations, newspapers and periodicals. Shivanath Shastri described the period as an era of 'social revolution' (*samajik viplab*).<sup>1</sup> Rajnarayan Bose too considered this period as the turning point in the history of Bengal, the end of *sekal* (*ancien regime*) and the beginning of *ekal* (modern age).<sup>2</sup> Most historians have agreed with Bose and Shastri; Professor Dodwell, the editor of *Cambridge History of India* and Professor R. C. Majumdar, the editor of the *History and Culture of the People of India* make very odd bedfellows on this issue. My colleague in Cambridge, Dr Percival Spear, used to offer a special subject for Cambridge History Tripos called 'The Foundations of Modern India, 1818–1835'. This was also the theme of Professor Ahmed's book;<sup>3</sup> he considers the period as the beginning of a new era, which came about due to social reforms and social conflicts. All historians of the Bengal Renaissance look back to this period as the beginning of what Kessori Charan Mittra once called the 'moral revolution'.<sup>4</sup> I think however, that these conflicts were not so ideologically orientated and the society was never so completely polarized.

In fact I feel that Evans-Pritchard's model for the Nuer tribesmen helps us to understand the social system of Bengal better than a model of continuous struggle between the two forces of reaction and progress or between two contending classes, between landlords and merchants. The society was never so divided as to disturb the existing social order. If the Nuer tribesmen had to co-operate because of their pastoral economy which depended on what Evans-Pritchard called oecology,<sup>5</sup> then the *bhadralok's* class interest held them together. Nobody wanted to

1 Shivanath Shastri, *op. cit.* pp. 95–114.

2 Rajnarayan Bose, *Sekal aar ekal*, reprint, Calcutta, 1363 (Bengali era), pp. 1–2.

3 A. F. S. Ahmed, *Social ideas and social change in Bengal, 1818–1835*, Leiden, 1965, pp. 27–31.

4 *Calcutta review*, Vol. 4 (July–December 1845), p. 385.

5 Evans-Pritchard, *op. cit.* pp. 190–1.

create a social revolution. 'Young Bengal' might have been intoxicated by the works of Tom Paine, could talk about 'liberty' and debate on Kant's rationalism, but could not produce a concrete programme for social reform, let alone act upon it.<sup>1</sup> Many members of the 'Young Bengal' group, in later years, became respectable, loyal British subjects ; they were recruited as deputy magistrates, and some served as fellows of Calcutta University. The 'Reformers' did not wish to part with tradition completely. Even Rammohun Roy patronized Brahmins through his Anglo-Vedanta school and the *Brahmo Samaj*. The Conservatives, on the other hand, were in favour of commerce, modern science and English education.

There existed many kinds of relationships and ties within the *bhadralok* community. These ties divided men at one point but united them at another. Thus even during the period when the relationship between their respective *dals* was most strained, the Debs and Tagores were united in protesting against the *la-ki-raj* land resumption act of 1828, or in welcoming the Jury Act of 1832. They worked together in the School Society, School Book Society, General Committee of Public Instruction and Hindu College. In 1832 Radhaprasad Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore were admitted to the School Book Society. In 1838 they jointly sponsored the Landholders' Society. Ashutosh Deb (Dey) and Radhamadhav Banerjee, two stalwarts of *Dharma Sabha*, had close financial ties with Dwarkanath Tagore ; they were all Directors of the Union Bank.<sup>2</sup>

The ties were, however, never permanent. Men moved from one *dal* to another, broke with old friends and made new alliances. Thus Ashutosh Deb (Dey), a close friend of Radhakanta Deb, and his *dal*, broke with his friends in 1845.<sup>3</sup> In 1851 the Debs and the Tagores joined hands in the British India Association. The Association for long remained under the control of these

1 For biographical notes of the members of 'The Young Bengal' group see Shivanath Shastri, *op. cit.* and for an analysis of their ideology see B. Ghosh, *op. cit.* Vol. 3, pp. 22-33.

2 *Samachar Darpan*, 23 : 7, 1831, *S.S.K.* Vol. 2, p. 337.

3 *Samachar Chandrika*, 1 August 1854 and 27 January 1845.

two families.<sup>1</sup> If Dwijendranath Tagore is to be believed, then during this period the Tagores regarded the *dal* led by Ashutosh Deb (Dey) as their chief rival.<sup>2</sup>

The politics through *dals* continued in harmony with the British-India administrative system. So long as politics were personal and one of patronage, *dalapatis* could claim leadership of the *bhadralok* and were recognized by the government as the representative of the 'native public opinion'. But with the introduction of the elective principles, first in the Calcutta Corporation, then in the Bengal Legislative Council, and with the influx of East Bengali students and the migration of many new *bhadralok* families into the city, who could not be controlled by the old *dals*, the *dalapatis* lost control. The caste restrictions were less rigid than they were in the early part of the century,<sup>3</sup> and the *dals* could no longer impose their *vyavasthas* on a new rising *grihastha bhadralok* class. No doubt, new *dals* (factions) were being formed based on kinship and neighbourhood ties,<sup>4</sup> which played a significant role in politics, but *dals* were no longer caste tribunals controlled by the *abhijats*. For them the harmonious society came to an end sometime in the mid 70s of the century. Dwijendranath Tagore looked back to his childhood when the society was based on the joint family system and despite *daladali*, there was peace and harmony in society.<sup>5</sup>

1 Radhakanta Deb was the first President and Debendranath Tagore was the first Secretary of The British-India Association, See P. N. Singh-Roy, *The Chronicle of The British-India Association*, Calcutta, 1965.

2 Dwijendranath Thakurer *smritikatha*, p. 285.

3 According to the *Census report* of 1911, 'It is in Bengal that the progress has been greatest in sweeping away the vexatious restrictions on eating and drinking imposed by the caste system. Many of the leading Indian gentlemen dine without hesitation with Europeans at the Calcutta Club and in private houses, and are served on such occasions by Muhammadan table servants', *Census, 1911, Bengal*, p. 388. J. N. Bhattacharya noticed the loosening of caste restrictions in 1892. See Bhattacharya, *op. cit.* pp. 248-9.

4 Ralph Nicholas, *op. cit.*

5 Dwijendranath Thakurer *smritikatha*, p. 286.

## CALCUTTA IN 1806 : AN ESSAY ON URBAN HISTORY AND THE COMPUTER

The purpose of my research project of which this paper is an introduction, has been to study the process of urbanization in Calcutta in the nineteenth century. Urbanization can be defined as a process of multiplication of points of concentration of population and an increase in size of individual centres of population. But the increased density of population is only a symptom of some deep rooted social and economic change. It is related to the push from the stagnant rural sector and the pull from its dynamic urban sector and to the disruption of old social ties and the birth of new class relationships. Durkheim once suggested that increased population density in a fixed land area 'can be described as a social morphological index'.<sup>1</sup> The aim of our research is to describe the social morphology of Calcutta in the nineteenth century.

It is however, too naive to expect a simple linear development from status to contract, from familial ties to impersonal relationships and from community to individual in the process of urbanization, particularly in a colonial setting. Many sociologists and urban historians have tried to connect the process of urbanization with technological revolutions. They find in the inventions of the steam engine, and in the belt and the pulley in the nineteenth century a centripetal force which created dense population around factory plants. In the twentieth century the discovery of the automobile, telephone and electricity have set in motion centrifugal forces which simultaneously diffused population and industry widely over the landscape and permitted larger agglomeration of both.<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars, in their studies of urbanization in the Third World, find no such devastating impact of technological revolu-

1 As quoted in Philip M. Hauser, 'Urbanization, an overview' in Philip M. Hauser and Leo F. Schnore (ed.), *The Study of urbanization*, New York, 1965, pp. 11 – 2.

2 Hauser, *op. cit.* p. 4.

tions on the growth of urban centres. Hence we are urged 'To divest (ourselves) of the western image of urbanization' when we study the process of urbanization in the Third World. It is suggested that the Third World urbanization be called 'subsistence urbanization' which is 'an urbanization of very high density of individuals living under conditions that may be even worse than the rural areas from which they have come, of not having available the kinds of work or means of support which will permit them to do more than merely survive'.<sup>1</sup> Many sober sociologists like the late Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose thought that the process of urbanization in India was arrested at some point and he called Calcutta 'a premature metropolis',<sup>2</sup> where familial and communal ties continued to exist in a modern commercial and administrative centre. It is our contention that there is no universal law which governs the process of urbanization in every country. The process of urbanization varies from region to region and in a given region urban development depends on many factors, geographical, social, economic and historical. In modern India the process of urbanization is bound up with the expansion of colonial administration and market society, which created a new dynamism in one sector and stagnation in another. This helped to create a class of collaborators in the cities and strengthened the power of the traditional elites in the rural areas. This duality in economy and society is best shown in the process of urbanization in the nineteenth century. If, by the process of becoming urban, we mean increase in the size of population in a fixed land area and changing patterns of social and economic behaviour, then there was a significant urban development in Calcutta in the nineteenth century. I hope to find out how social groups, such as castes and communities which moved out of the rural environment into Calcutta, evolved an urban culture and became involved in modern politics. It was not a one-way process, for if Calcutta overshadowed Bengal, life

1 Gerald Breese, *Urbanization in newly developing countries*, Princeton, 1966, pp. 4-5.

2 N. K. Bose, 'Calcutta—a premature metropolis', *Scientific American*, New York, September, 1965, pp. 91-102. Cf. Idem, *A Survey of Calcutta*, Calcutta 1964.

in the city was conditioned by the social mores of rural Bengal. There was no dichotomy between modernity and tradition in Calcutta, but each influenced the other.

Urban history is a neglected subject in India for a number of reasons ; partly because the vast majority of the\* people of India live in villages and historians have recently directed their interest to rural India, to the agrarian system, to the peasants' revolts and other related topics and partly because the present-day official ideology is committed to the villages. It is not true that the cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Allahabad are not mentioned in the history books (in fact the British rulers and the Indian nationalist politicians from the cities dominate their pages), but the cities generally appear as mere seats of government where many politicians lived and where many dramatic political events took place. The socio-political structure of the cities, the economic life, the urban culture, however, have no place in the standard histories of India. In other words urban history has not yet evolved as a subject in its own right in India.

I think that there are three good reasons why we should be interested in urban history. I have already suggested that the duality of the development of market under the colonial system is nowhere better reflected than in the process of urbanization in the nineteenth century. Hence urban history should be a good guide to the nature of colonial expansion. Secondly, although the majority of the people in the Third World live in the villages and the most successful liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Cuba were peasant based, the cities are important centres of political, cultural and intellectual actions. The liberation movement in Vietnam, for instance, was not fully successful until the fall of Saigon, and no movement is without its leadership from the cities.<sup>1</sup> Moreover one third of the total world urban population live in Asia alone. Hence no historian can ignore the cities of the Third World. Thirdly, methodologically urban history could be very exciting for historians interested in new

1 Since Gramsci most Marxist scholars admit that intellectuals are significant in revolutionary situations. For Gramsci's views see A. Gramsci, *Modern Prince and other writings*, London, 1957.

techniques of research. One can see history as a whole and discover the interconnection between demographic, social, economic, political and cultural history. One can combine the traditional methods of history with anthropological and quantitative methods to discover the totality of history.

There are a number of reasons why I find the history of Calcutta more exciting than the history of any other city in India. It is not because it was the second largest city in the Empire, nor because it was the capital of British India, but because Calcutta, unlike Bombay, had close links with its rural setting and because it was through Calcutta that the British capitalist system operated in India and left its deep imprint upon the city. Moreover, the exciting intellectual life in Calcutta makes it all the more rewarding to study its urban history. No urban history of Calcutta is complete without the mention of bad drains, poor medical service, unemployment, beggars and political unrests. But no serious historian can ignore the rich intellectual life of the city. The exciting intellectual and cultural activities go on in the same streets which are haunted by stark poverty and squalor. In fact one feels that there is a connection between the bad drains, dead puppies, crippled children and heated discussions on Ezra Pound, Elliot or Gramsci, or a musical evening with Nikhil Banerjee.

There is an additional personal reason why I am interested in Calcutta. I am weary of presentism in history. I have no desire to select some factors of history out of context to make them relevant to current concerns. Yet we must recognise that historians are not mere chroniclers of past events. We study the past from the present, recognising the fact that both history and historian are part of a process of development of awareness of ourselves and our environment. If we borrow a phrase from Collingwood, history is a process of 'self knowledge'.<sup>1</sup> I often think that in the lanes and byelanes of Calcutta in 1806 I am trying to discover my own identity and I think Collingwood would have liked us to write history in this way.

The histories of Calcutta that have been handed down to us

1 R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, Oxford, 1939, pp. 10 – 102.



can be broadly divided into two groups. There are those historians who wrote about the exotic customs of the white people in a colonial city in the sun. These 'memsahib in the sun' type of articles filled the pages of the early issues of *Bengal Past and Present* and along these lines Busteed wrote a bestseller called *Echoes of Old Calcutta*, at the end of the last century. Many Bengali historians have followed Busteed and have been writing on what might be called 'the babus and their nautch girls' type of history. The other group of historians, mostly Bengali, have been interested in the intellectual history of the Calcutta elite. There appeared a corpus of literature on the so-called Bengal Renaissance, ever since K. C. Mitra wrote about the 'moral revolution' in Bengal in the *Calcutta Review* in 1845.<sup>1</sup> But so far no one has made a sustained effort to study the history of the city, her people, her social structure, her economic underdevelopment and her local politics. No one has tried to study the urban history of Calcutta in its totality.

The primary purpose of our research is to quantify social history of Calcutta. But we are not solely concerned with numbers; in our research we hope to weave together social, political, cultural and intellectual history based on records which have not hitherto been used, for example the Survey Records, now preserved in the India Office Library and the records preserved in the Library and Records Room of the Calcutta Corporation.

It is difficult to find hard statistical material for Calcutta in the nineteenth century. In other words, the numerical data that we have are not absolutely reliable. The first full scale census of the city was taken in 1866. There were, however, many attempts to discover the vital statistics of Calcutta. F. W. Simms's *Report on the Survey of Calcutta, 1849-50*, for example was considered not reliable even by many nineteenth-century scholars. The Census Reports were thought to be not very reliable until 1881. Most social historians of Bengal, have relied rather too heavily on Census Reports.<sup>2</sup> It must be remembered that the statistical

1 *Calcutta review*, Vol. 4, 1845, p. 385.

2 Some modern social historians, who cannot read Bengali rely almost entirely on Government records including the Censuses. Please see A. Seal, *Emergence of Indian nationalism*, Cambridge, 1968.

data in the Censuses have already been aggregated for us and that the way they were collected is not very reliable. I wish to quote from the 1881 Census to illustrate this point. The methods that we have used for quantifying social history of Calcutta for the years before Censuses are certainly no less reliable than the Census Reports of the nineteenth century.

Beverley, Census Commissioner of Calcutta, in 1881 wrote :

'On the night of the Census I drove through a considerable part of the town in company with Mr. Bourdillon, the Deputy Superintendent of Census operations in Bengal. Every where the scene was striking and impressive. The hum of business was hushed earlier than usual, and a great silence had fallen on the town. Streets that are ordinarily crowded with passengers were that evening totally deserted. At 8 P. M. the town was as quiet as it usually is at midnight. The people had all retired to their houses and were sitting in expectation of what would happen next. It was said that the street lamps were to be extinguished at that hour and that persons then found outside their homes would get into trouble. In some places the wildest rumours were afloat...It had been requested that a light might be kept burning in each house until the enumerator had paid his visit, and it is possible that this request gave rise to much surmise and speculation in the minds of an imaginative Oriental people. Everywhere, however, the request was complied with. As we drove along, we could see that a light was burning in each house, showing that the inmates were awake and still expecting the arrival of the enumerators. From time to time these officers were met with, accompanied in each case by a constable and perhaps an assistant or two...Judging from the manner in which the people kept to their own homes, the interest they took in the matter, and the general alacrity with which they supplied information and did their best to second the exertions of the authorities, there can be little doubt that the result of the night's work was very complete and successful.'<sup>1</sup>

Beverly might have thought that his task was 'very complete and successful' ; we shall always have serious doubt about the information supplied to the enumerators on such a night

1 *Report of the census of Calcutta, 1881*, p. 10.

full of expectations. This is not to deride the census reports, in fact much interesting information can still be gathered from them, but they should not be accepted uncritically.<sup>1</sup>

## II

The primary purpose of this paper is to give a report of our pilot survey of Calcutta in 1806. We hope to show how one can use the Computer to gather statistics regarding land use and land ownership prior to the Census Reports, how bits and pieces of information about single individuals or a single plot of land at the same point in time, or at different points in time can be disaggregated and then reaggregated with the aid of the Computer. We can try to discover a pattern behind these otherwise unimportant bits and pieces of information. But we also hope to show the limitations of the use of the Computer and the quantitative methods in general, for the study of urban history. From our pilot survey we have learnt some important lessons which have helped us to improve our techniques of research. We hope to share them with our readers.<sup>2</sup>

For our pilot survey we have used the House Assessment Books of the Corporation of Calcutta (henceforth HAB). In the eighteenth century, at last since 1781 some attempts were made to levy house rates to organize Municipal funds.<sup>3</sup> But it was in

- 1 Perhaps historians of India should follow some of the English urban historians, who have recently subjected their Censuses to quantitative analysis. See H. J. Doys (ed.), *The Study of urban history*, London, 1968.
- 2 For an interesting study of the use of quantitative methods for social history, see Ellen E MacDonald 'Use of Quantitative Materials in Historical Research; Methods and Conceptual issues in The Social History of the Indian Educated Elite'. Unpublished paper read at Meinnnesota Conference on Indian Historiography, June, 1969.
- 3 Bengal (Home) Public Consultations, 2 July, 1781, State Archives of West Bengal. There is a copy of a letter from the Commissioner of Police, with a complete estimate of the value of all shops, land, houses, tenements, etc. in the Town of Calcutta 'as well as assessment of Tax for the year 1781'.

In 1792 there was a petition from a Ramgopal Basu and a Giridhar Babu, 'on behalf of the native inhabitants of Calcutta, representing the hardships of the poor people on account of the rigorous enforcement of the collection of house tax in Calcutta, and soliciting redress'. Bengal (Home) Public Consultations, 24 August, 1792.

1794 that statute 33 GEO-III C. 52 gave the Justices of Peace in Calcutta legal authority to assess house rates.<sup>1</sup> It was then decided that rates should not exceed 5% of the estimated value of the property (house and ground), irrespective of whether such property was rented or occupied by the owner. In practice however, the rates were determined at 5% of the supposed quarterly rental value of the property. But many premises including Churches, Mosques and Temples were exempted from house tax.

According to Goode,<sup>2</sup> the first regular assessment was made by a Mr. Mackey in 1795. Two other assessments were taken before 1840, one in 1809 and the other in 1819. They were supposed to have covered the whole town of Calcutta. The boundaries of the town were determined by the same Act which gave the Justices of Peace municipal authority. The northern boundary was Maratha Ditch, the eastern boundary Circular Road (which was constructed along the eastern portion of the Ditch), the western boundary the Hooghly and the southern boundary ran along the Lower Circular Road to Kidderpore Bridge and Tolly's Nullah to the river including the Port and Cooly Bazar (Hastings).

If our records are to be believed, assessments were made irregularly and they did not always cover the whole area of the town. We have no records of assessment before 1806 and then only 3 HABs which covered only a part of the town. At the back of each book there usually is an index of streets covered and dated signature of the collector in charge of the particular area. By comparing these street indexes we have reached some conclusions about the books. It seems that groups of books fall into sets that cover substantially the same area (that is, roughly the same streets, the exception being streets that are presumably new after 1806). For instance Books 1, 3, 4A, 6, 11, 12 cover the same area, while Books 2, 4, 9 cover another area. For the year 1806 we have only 3 books, Books 1, 2 and 2A, covering 107 streets of Calcutta. The northern boundary of this area was just south of Narain Chatterjee's Road (modern

1 S. W. Goode, *Municipal Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1916, pp. 11-2.

2 *Op. cit.* p. 52.

Keshab Sen Street) including Tuntuneah's Bazar (with the exception of Hari Ghosh's St., and Mudden Dutt's Lane, Moonshy Suderuddy's Lane at Machooa Bazar which was north of Narain Chatterjee's Road). The western boundary ran along Cossitollah St. (Bentinck St.) and Lower Chitpore Road, while the eastern boundary was somewhere west of Circular Road. The southern boundary ran along the Burial Ground Road. When we closely examine the 107 streets that are covered by 3 HABs we find that all streets between Durrumtollah St. and Bow Bazar St. and between Durrumtollah St. and Chowringee were well covered. This survey left out the densely populated Northern Division of the town, the administrative centre round the Tank Square, the European residential areas and the Cooli Bazar of the Southern Division.

Although it covered only a small area of the town we have chosen 1806 assessment for our pilot survey. This area was interesting, fairly densely populated, cosmopolitan in character (Europeans, Eurasians, Armenians, Muslims, Hindus and others lived here), and we have good records of at least 46 streets of this area for the first six decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it seemed to us that 107 streets are a large enough number to give a fair indication of what we might expect in other areas at other points of time ; yet it is small enough to handle.

It must be remembered that the purpose of HAB was to record valuations made on the basis of estimated and actual rental value of property owned, for the purposes of taxation by municipal government. The information is organized by address. Streets are arranged in order of their numbers (as assigned probably by the Justices of Peace). The data are in a standard format : lot number, description of the premises, name/s of the person/s assessed, rental value or estimated rental value for the lot, and tax. In the next page we give an example of HAB entries on Machooa Bazar Road of another year.

The premise description is structural rather than functional, for example, HAB would say 'upper roomed house' even though it was used as a charity school. But there are exceptions to this. In 1806 for instance, we have one entry of a 'brothel' and we come across many entries of 'liquor shops' and 'flour shops'.

# MACHOOA BAZAR ROAD

No. of House	Premises	Persons assessed	Rent per month	R. A. p.	R. A. p.	Tax per quarter
55	19 Straw huts 31 Straw shops 3 tatties & bazar	...	...	...	...	...
50	8 Straw huts	...	...	...	...	...
57	1 Lower Room and Moozeed	...	...	...	...	...
58	17 Straw huts & 1 Straw Bungalow	...	...	...	...	...
59	4 Oil mills 72 S. huts 1 Tiled hut 1 S. shop	...	...	...	...	...
	1 T. h. 2 coconut oil shop and large fish pond	...	...	...	...	...
60	1 Upper 6 Lower Rms. 16 S. huts, garden & tank	...	...	...	...	...
61	6 S. huts & coconut garden	...	...	...	...	...
62	1 Old Lower Room house & 6 S. huts	...	...	...	...	...
63	1 " 4 " "	...	...	...	...	...
64	1 New " & 2 " "	...	...	...	...	...
65	4 Straw huts	...	...	...	...	...
66	1 New Lower Room & 2 Straw huts	...	...	...	...	...
		Maulobee Budder Ally	100/—/—	15/—/—	15/—/—	15/—/—
		Saik Gomany & Saik Bajoo	5/—/—	—/12/—	—/12/—	—/12/—
		Bholkey Raunr	7/—/—	1/—/16	1/—/16	1/—/16
		Nemychunder Mullick	15/—/—	2/—/4	2/—/4	2/—/4
		Muttychund Baboo	50/—/—	7/—/8	7/—/8	7/—/8
		Ramsoonder Ghosaul	30/—/—	4/—/8	4/—/8	4/—/8
		Hurrolaul Ghose	5/—/—	—/12/—	—/12/—	—/12/—
		Colleydoss Ghose	5/—/—	—/14/8	—/14/8	—/14/8
		Groodoss Mozoomdar	4/—/—	—/9/12	—/9/12	—/9/12
		Colleyprosaud Dutt	12/—/—	1/12/16	1/12/16	1/12/16
		Bonmaley Sircar	3/—/—	—/7/4	—/7/4	—/7/4
		Bindabun Cassary	10/—/—	1/—/8	1/—/8	1/—/8

We do not know whether the numbering system was like the present day, one of odd numbers on the one side of the street and even numbers on the other, or whether some other pattern prevailed. We hope that survey records for later years will be able to help us with this. In the 'persons assessed' column there are sometimes entries for 'so-and-so others'. Consequently we lose the names of some of the owners.

At first glance the information about Machooa Bazar Road does not appear to be very significant. But on close study we realize that each column contains some sociological information. As a whole they present an interesting social pattern. The richest man (in terms of ownership of property) in this neighbourhood was a Muslim Maulavi whose neighbours were two Muslims, a Brahmin, one *Kansari*, one *Sadgop*, three or four *Kayasthas*, one well-known *Babu*, one *Subarnavanik* and a prostitute. The lots were not equal in size or value. The Brahmin and the *Babu* had very large plots containing many residential quarters, gardens and tanks, but the Maulavi's Bazar and his shops were more valuable than the former's property. The *Sadgop* had the cheapest and smallest plot in the neighbourhood ; he owned 4 straw huts whose rental value was only Rs. 3. The prostitute owned a small lower roomed house and a mosque. She was richer than many others in the neighbourhood.

If we look at one area over a period of time we can form an idea of social change : change in the size of lots, types of premises, ownership of property, and value of land. On the other hand, if we were to study a number of streets at a given point of time we begin to see the social morphology of Calcutta at that point of time, giving us patterns of land use, ownership of property, value of property and types of neighbourhoods. So, after reaggregation of the discrete data, an interesting social pattern emerges.

Our problem was to find a method of reorganizing the data for the purpose of historical research. We soon abandoned the idea of manually classifying and co-relating 180,000 entries from the HABs of first sixty years, not to mention other quantitative data which we had gathered from the Street Directories and Survey Records : we decided to use the Computer and to carry out a pilot survey of 3 HABs of 1806. Preparing the data and

Code Book, transferring the data to the data sheets according to the Code Book, writing up a program (for which we were helped by the Computer Centre, University of Sydney), arranging the printout formats and finally, analysing the printouts, took longer than we had expected.

The first step in preparing the data consisted of standardizing the spellings of the street names and giving each of them a number. Each collector had had his own system of numbering and nearly every clerk had had his own system of spelling Indian street names. We also wanted to standardize the spelling of the owners' names. So we calculated the number of owners in 72 streets. Two research assistants worked full-time for twelve days. They identified 2,881 owners in these streets, but another 33 at least could not be identified. We could never be sure, for example, that Ghulam Hussain of one street was the same Ghulam Hussain of another street or whether Ahmud Jehmader was the same person as Ahmat Jumudar. Ultimately we abandoned the idea of using individual names as a basic working unit. Instead, the owners of Calcutta properties were divided into 9 broad groups : European, Muslim, Non-Bengali Hindu, Bengali Hindu, Parsee, Chinese, Voluntary Society, Government and Unclassified (a category which includes some low castes and others who could not fit into any of the other categories, or whose caste could not be determined). The Bengalis were further subdivided into 33 caste groups (Weavers of Calcutta are separated from the *Tantis* of the rural areas, hence they are a separate category for the Computer). Provisions were made to record female owners under each caste group (we have, however, discovered that our Computer program cannot calculate the amount of property owned by females). A provision was also made for recording ownership of property by prostitutes.

The term 'European' is used rather loosely. It includes Europeans, Eurasians and Armenians (and perhaps one or two native Christians with European names). 'Muslims' describes both Bengali and non-Bengali Muslims for we found it difficult to determine Bengali Muslims from their names. It proved to be most difficult to identify Bengali Hindu caste names. Some caste names are easy for they are often used as endname, for instance, Dome, Muchi, Kamar, Kansari and so on. There are also some



surnames which are peculiar to certain caste groups, for instance all Mukherjees are Brahmins. But there are surnames, such as Das, which are common to more than one caste. There are some titles such as Majumdar which are used as surnames by many castes. We decided to rely on Risley<sup>1</sup> and Bhattacharya<sup>2</sup> for caste names in the nineteenth century. Accordingly we made a list of surnames under each caste group, then extracted those surnames which were common to more than one caste. We arranged these names in alphabetical order and put all possible castes against those names. We also studied Bengali names as they appear in Brajendra Nath Banerjee's *Sangbad Patre Sekaler Katha*<sup>3</sup> and Benoy Ghosh's *Samayikpatre Banglar Samajchitra*<sup>4</sup> and Bengali works in print before 1850. We came to some interesting conclusions. Bengali castes were determined according to the following assumptions : most of the Bengali migrants to the city before 1850 came from the West Bengal districts (we assumed for instance that Calcutta Nandis were from West Bengal and not East Bengal, hence they were *Tilis*, Nandis from East Bengal being mostly *Kayasthas*). Most high castes tended to have Sanskritized first names. Low castes tended to adopt *Vaisnava* first names, for example Govardhan, Hari-ballabh and so on. Many *Kayasthas* and other upper castes had *Sakta* style names, such as Kaliprasad, Kashinath, Gouri Sankar and so on. It is also interesting to note that rich but ritually low caste, such as the *Subarnavaniks*, had *Vaisanava* names. With the exception of Raja Nubkissen's descendants, many adopted Krisna as their second names. Although their family was recognised as *Maulik Kayastha* and later received *Kulin* status, there are good reasons to believe that they originated from *Subarnavanik* caste.<sup>5</sup>

- 1 H. H. Risley, *Tribes and castes of Bengal*. 2 Vols. Calcutta, 1891 - '92.
- 2 J. N. Bhattacharya, *Hindu castes and sects*, reprint, Calcutta, 1968.
- 3 B. N. Banerjee (ed.), *Sangbad patre sekaler katha*, 2 Vols. Calcutta, 1356 (Bengali Era).
- 4 Benoy Ghosh (ed.), *Samayikpatre Banglar samajchitra*, 4 Vols. Calcutta, 1964-66.
- 5 In the 'Chelat' (Khelat) account of Bengali year 1173 (1766-67), Nubkissen is referred to as one of the men belonging to Clive and Sykes and was called Nabkissen Cawndoo (Navakrishna Kundu). Kundu was and still is one of the surnames of the *Subarnavaniks*. It was widely be-

We have also determined castes according to neighbourhoods. It is assumed that artisan castes tended to live together, that kinsfolk lived in the same neighbourhood and that lower castes mingled easily with Muslims, non-Bengalis and prostitutes (they did not suffer from pollution complex). I am sure that we have made some mistakes and have determined some castes wrongly. But every possible care was taken to avoid such mistakes.

The identity of the prostitutes has been determined by their first and last names. Thus we assume that John Bibi was a European or Eurasian prostitute, Razina Bibi a Muslim prostitute and Fulmani Raur a Hindu prostitute. For the Computer we have given each caste and each community a literal symbol. Eu for European, BR for Brahmin and so on. These symbols are used in some of our Tables. The Computer was asked to record the ownership of property according to caste and community, for each street and for the area as a whole. A provision has been made to record the ownership of property by leading families of Calcutta. It has been assumed that the political and social leadership came from the *dalapatis*, leading *abhijats* of Calcutta.<sup>1</sup> As *dalapatis* operated through their *dals* based on kinship and friends we decided to use family as the basic unit for leadership. A list of 'famous families' was made on the basis of our studies of the lists found in the Foreign Miscellaneous Series, National Archives of India,<sup>2</sup> in L. N. Ghose's work<sup>3</sup> and in the proceedings and reports of public meetings and associations as reported in the newspapers. When we made our list we took into account the political and social allegiance of a particular kinsgroup, hence we have two Tagore

lived in Calcutta that the Debs were *Subarnavanik* in origin and it would seem that the records confirm the oral tradition. See *Further report from the Committee of Secrecy appointed to enquire into the state of The East India Company*, Calcutta, 1773, 'Kasimbazar Private Collection', Appendix 60 (B).

I am grateful to Hitesh R. Sanyal for this reference.

- 1 'Daladali in Calcutta in the nineteenth century', pp. 60 ff.
- 2 Foreign Miscellaneous Series, Vols. 130 and 139, National Archives of India.
- 3 L. N. Ghose, *The Modern history of the Indian chiefs, zamindars etc.* Vol. 2, Calcutta, 1879-81.

families and two Deb families. On the other hand there were leading men like Rev. Krishna Mohun Banerjee who had no 'families'. With the aid of L. N. Ghose, *Sambandha Nirnay*<sup>1</sup> and N. N. Basu's *Banger Jatiya Itihas*,<sup>2</sup> genealogies of most of these 'famous families' were made. Each 'family' was given a number; all 'family' members whose names appear in the family genealogy and who lived between c. 1800 and 1870, received a family number. For instance no. 3 refers to all members of Gopimohun Deb's family.

The Computer was asked to record the total value of property owned by each family over the whole city, types of premises owned and the streets in which they were situated.

The premises recorded in the HABs are divided into 2 broad groups, residential and non-residential. They were further subdivided into 7 residential and 15 non-residential groups according to their structures and functions. We wanted to discover the pattern of land use in Calcutta, how many premises were residential, how many non-residential and where they were situated.

Notice the salient feature of our research: the major part of our time was absorbed in disaggregating and rearranging the data prior to the application of the Computer. We analysed HABs with the aid of non-quantitative sources and applied the Computer to read, to identify, to count, to classify and co-relate our variables. The Computer is asked to do the tedious job of counting, but decisions about the data are made by the researcher. His power is however limited by the very nature of the Computer program. Many individual characteristics of our variables cannot be quantified and are lost in the IBM Punch Cards. To save some of this interesting information we have used a system of comment cards. For instance we have been able to retain some information about a prostitute called Moynah Tackooraney who owned two lots in Moonshy Saderuddy's Lane in which there were 14 straw huts, one upper roomed house and a mosque. We do not however know who were her clients and

1 Pandit Lalmohun Vidyanidhi, *Sambandha nirnaya*, Calcutta, 1874.

2 N. N. Basu, *Banger jatiya itihas*, 8 vols. 1321-1322 (Bengali era).

whether they prayed in her mosque. The comment cards also preserved such information as that of a brothel in 235 and 236 Bow Bazar St., owned by a member of Dwarkanath Tagore's family. It had 43 rooms for prostitutes and its rental value was Rs. 140.

### III

The file output contains Tables as follows :

- 1 Proprietor groups versus counts, rent and premise types for each street (107 Tables).
- 2 The same information, total over the city (2 Tables). •
- 3 'Famous family' versus rent and premise types over the city (2 Tables).
- 4 Same information for streets in which 'famous families' owned properties (60 Tables).

The Tables in this text, the analysis of the patterns of ownership by famous families, and of some of the streets and finally our report are based on studies of these 171 Tables.

The central and south-eastern part of the Town of Calcutta was residential (29,794 out of 44,220 premises). The majority of the people lived in straw huts (23,938). The Europeans and seven Bengali Hindu caste groups owned residential property and probably constituted the upper and middle strata of the society. The Non-Bengalis and Muslims constituted the bulk of the urban lower order, living mostly in straw huts and tiled huts and most probably employed in transport service. It is interesting to note that in this area only 23 premises were used as palm-kin stands, horse drawn carriage stands and stables. It is highly likely that the majority of the people in this area were Muslims. They held the largest number of lots (26.9%) and premises (14,680), not very valuable property (Rs. 8 the average per lot), and there were 13 mosques. The poorest section (in terms of ownership) of the community were the untouchables and poor artisan castes such as *Muchis* (their average per lot was less than Rs. 5).

The prostitutes must have played a very significant role in this town of migrants. They owned a significant portion of the

property (5·8% of the total rental value of premises) and the European prostitutes were well-off by 1806 standard (average per lot being Rs. 15).

If our calculation of owners of 72 streets is any indication, most residents of Calcutta owned property. There were 2,881 owners for about 3,000 lots.

The largest number of non-residential premises were petty shops (1,129 out of 11,426) and only 222 premises were used for large scale commercial purposes (warehouses, timber yards etc.) and 43 premises were used for petty industries such as oil mills. A vast area of the town was still not urbanised—727 premises were used for agricultural purposes, 8,487 plots were vacant and a large number of the 722 social service premises were water tanks.

We have chosen 5 streets from 3 HABs to show varieties of land use and land ownership in 3 different areas of the Town :

### COSSITOLAH STREET

The following proprietor groups were found in this street : European, Government, Muslim, Non-Bengali, Brahmin, *Kayastha*, *Subarnavanik* and Weaver. Europeans owned nearly all the most expensive properties (21 houses, 2 Commercial Residential, each on a separate lot). Muslims owned the largest number of both residential and non-residential premises (28 and 20) but they were crowded in 9 lots and the rental value of these premises was very low (Rs. 38 the average per lot). Non-Bengalis owned one large house, 13 huts, 8 shops in two lots. The house was rather expensive. One Brahmin proprietor owned 6 shops (Rs. 4-3-0 per shop). *Kayasthas* owned 7 shops and 3 premises used for governmental purposes; they were situated in 5 lots. One lot containing one shop was owned by a famous *Kayastha* family (Rasiklal Dutt, family no. 23). *Subarnavaniks* owned rather poor property, Weavers on the other hand owned one large upper roomed house whose rental value was Rs. 125. It is possible that the two large houses owned by a non-Bengali and a Weaver were rented out to the Europeans.

Most of the non-residential premises were shops (49 out of 56). Nearly half of these shops belonged to the Muslims (20 out of

49). The only commercial properties in this street belonged to the Europeans (2 C and 2 CR). There were 39 owners for 45 lots and no female proprietor.

### CHITPORE ROAD

17 different categories of owners were found here : European, Government, Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Non-Bengali, Unclassified, Hindu Prostitute (UCP), Brahmin, *Gandhavanik*, Goldsmith, *Kalu*, *Kayastha*, *Moir*a, *Pod*, *Sunri*, *Subarnavanik* and *Tili*.

There were 367 residential and 263 non-residential premises. *Kayasthas* owned the largest number of premises (195), consisting of 24 houses, 5 bungalows, 57 shops, 8 commercial, 90 straw huts and 10 tiled huts. The rental value of their property was low (Rs. 28 was the average per lot). Europeans on the other hand owned lesser number of premises (160), which included 48 houses and 50 bungalows ; the rental value of these premises was much higher than that of any other proprietor group (Rs. 51 was the average per lot). The *Subarnavaniks* were the only other caste who owned significant property (94 premises, of which there were 12 houses, 2 bungalows and 56 shops). The other 13 categories of owners had no significant property. A *Moir*a had two shops. The *Pods* owned all the industrial premises in the street and Europeans and non-Bengalis between them shared the transport premises. Beside the prostitutes there was one European female proprietor and 10 famous families who held property in Chitpore Road. There were 151 owners of 189 lots.

### MUDDEN DUTT'S LANE

This small street was completely residential (43 premises), and not expensive (Rs. 14 the average per lot). There were 8 proprietor groups, Brahmin, Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Unclassified, Hindu Prostitute, *Kayastha*, *Sadgop* and *Subarnavanik*. It included 3 famous families who had 17 houses and 26 huts. Brahmins owned 20 huts. There were 15 owners for 15 lots.

### JAUN BAZAR 3rd LANE

This was another small street, and the rental value of proper-

tics was rather low (Rs. 7 average per lot). But there were ten proprietor groups who held 24 lots ; they were Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Hindu Prostitute, Unclassified, Brahmin, Goldsmith, *Kaibartya*, *Kayastha*, *Napit*, *Tanti* and *Tili*.

The *Sonars* (Goldsmiths) dominated the street with 3 houses, 7 huts and 9 shops. Each of their houses was valued at about Rs. 12. Muslims again owned a large part of the total property, 8 premises being vacant. The *Kayasthas* owned the largest number of huts (22) and their one lower roomed house had a rental value of about Rs. 25 per month. This was by far the best property in the street although its value was low in comparison to other Calcutta houses. There were 18 vacant premises 7 of which were owned by one female of *Napit* caste, who had to pay Rs. 1-3-0 tax per quarter for them.

#### COLINGAH MOOCHI PARA LANE

This was an unusual and interesting street. It was a very poor area with 115 lots whose total rental value was Rs. 93 (Rs. 6 the average per lot). 10 categories of owners were found here : European, Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Unclassified, Hindu Prostitute, Brahmin, *Dhopa*, *Kayastha*, *Muchi*, *Pod*, *Sadgop* and *Subarnavanik*.

The *Muchis* owned the largest number of properties and their average per lot was higher than their average per lot over the city (Rs. 6 as against Rs. 5). There were no female or famous family owners. There were 524 vacant plots, 108 of which belonged to the *Muchis* and 340 to the Muslims.

Table I shows the total figures of lots and various types of premises over the city. As already noted, Calcutta was an under-developed city, a vast area was still vacant, where a large number of premises were used for agricultural purposes and the majority of the residential quarters were straw huts. Yet there were a substantial number of pukka houses (4,694), some commercial and industrial areas and a significant number of premises provided modern social services such as hospitals, schools and public toilets.

It would seem that there was a significant and thriving middle-class group who lived in the brick houses and the vast majority

of the urban poor lived in straw huts probably employed in service industries. There were fewer tiled huts (only 1,262), probably indicative of the absence of a substantial number of fairly well-to-do artisans.

Table II shows the rental value of property owned by each community. The Government, according to our HABs, owned the best property in this part of the city (Rs. 72 the average per lot). But they owned only 12 lots and the total rental value of their premises was Rs. 864. The Europeans were at the apex of the society ; they owned 823 lots (12.9% of the total number of lots) valued at Rs. 40,792 (40.5% of the total rental value). Their average per lot was Rs. 49. Muslims, by contrast, owned the largest number of lots (1,716 or 26.9%), valued at Rs. 14,802 (4.7%) and their average per lot was only Rs. 8. The value of properties owned by Muslims was lower than that of the Bengali Hindus, high and/or rich castes, European Prostitutes and non-Bengalis. By grading the rental value according to average per lot per community we have :

Rs. 50 and above	Government
Rs. 25 – 49	European ,
Rs. 15 – 25	Brahmin, <i>Kayastha</i> , <i>Baidya</i> , <i>Subarnavanik</i> , <i>Tili</i> , Weaver, <i>Gandhavanik</i> and European Prostitute
Rs. 11 – 13	Non-Bengali
Rs. 6 – 10	Muslim, Muslim Prostitute, Unclassified, <i>Aguri</i> , <i>Chasadhopa</i> , Goldsmith, <i>Hari</i> , <i>Kamar</i> , <i>Kumor</i> , <i>Kalu</i> , <i>Kansavanik</i> , <i>Moirra</i> , <i>Mali</i> , <i>Napit</i> , <i>Pod</i> , <i>Sadgop</i> and <i>Sunri</i>
Rs. 1 – 5	<i>Bagdi</i> , Carpenter, <i>Dhopa</i> , <i>Dome</i> , <i>Jelia</i> , <i>Katvartya</i> , <i>Muchi</i> and <i>Tanti</i> .

It is interesting to note that the majority of the *abhijat bhadralok* of Calcutta came from six out of the seven Bengali castes whose rental value of property was lower than that of the Government and the Europeans but higher than that of all other owner groups.



Table III shows owners and premise types. All proprietor groups owned straw huts although the Muslims owned the largest number (7,787). They also owned the largest number of vacant plots (5,208), lower roomed houses (402) and commercial premises (59). One can deduce from Table II that rental value of these brick houses was very low ; they should be considered as brick huts and in our new Code Book we have entered them as such.

The Europeans owned the largest number of bungalows, upper roomed houses, agricultural plots and transport premises. They had 498 vacant plots.

The largest number of shops were owned by the *Kayasthas*. They owned the second largest number of premises (4,802 residential and 441 non-residential), and 199 upper roomed houses. The Brahmins owned the largest number of industrial premises (19) and 169 shops. The *Subarnavanik* was the only other Bengali Hindu caste who owned some substantial property in the city (1,841 premises), including 111 shops, 71 upper roomed houses and 134 lower roomed houses.

It would seem that the good residential properties belonged to the Europeans. They also owned the largest number of agricultural plots.

38 'famous families' owned properties in 60 streets, though none of them had any substantial property in these streets (the total rental value of all the premises owned by the 38 'families' was Rs. 7,361). None of these 'families' had a domain or an area of influence in a particular street or in a particular neighbourhood ; their properties were scattered all over the city. It must be remembered however that the bulk of their properties was in the Northern Division of the city and a number of 'families' in our list had not become 'famous' yet.

Table IV shows 'famous families' and the ownership of premises. Nearly all of them had straw huts. One Brahmin family owned 19 industrial premises. Not many owned upper roomed houses in this area. Nemai Charan Mallick and his family (no. 5) owned 4 upper roomed houses, 663 straw huts, 4 lower roomed houses, 21 tiled huts, 2 commercial upper, 18 commercial, 10 shops and 1 agricultural plot. The total rental value of their property was Rs. 971 (13·2% of the total rental value of

property owned by the 'famous families'). Gukul Chandra Mitra's family (no. 16) was the richest in the area, the total rental value of their properties was Rs.1,508 (20.5%) ; they owned 8 premises including one large commercial property in Durrumtollah Street. The rental value of this property was Rs. 1,500. A close study of 60 streets shows that the following 'families' owned properties in almost each street Deb (no. 3), Tagore (no. 9), Tagore (no. 44), Mallick (no. 5), Mallick (no. 22), Mitra (no. 15), Datta (no. 23) and Das (no. 36). Most of the other 30 'families' owned properties in more than one street.

### CONCLUSION

The picture of Calcutta that emerges is of a commercial city, still involved in agriculture, where land was not fully utilised for urban development. The richest single group of owners were Europeans. Muslims in the central and south-eastern part of the town constituted the bulk of petty owners and perhaps also the bulk of the population. Seven Bengali Hindu castes and European Prostitutes were richer than all other categories of owners except the Government and Europeans, and the non-Bengalis closely followed. The Brahmins, *Kayasthas* and Muslims owned property in almost every street and they owned all types of premises, which perhaps indicates that these are very broad categories, including rich, middling and poor classes.

These are not very startling discoveries. They confirm many impressionistic views of the city. We have however numbers to support our theories, and we have a clear view of the houses, tanks, warehouses, brothels, temples and other structures and their owners in 107 streets in 1806.

It must be remembered that this is a survey of one area only and our Computer program was not perfect. We have not been able to calculate the total amount of property owned by females ; and we have not been able to use individual owners as our basic unit. We did not identify the Untouchable proprietor groups nor distinguish between low cost brick houses and high cost brick houses. We have subsequently made a number of changes in coding and programing. There are some serious limitations in using quantitative methods.

The final survey will be a study of the physical structure of the city and the owners (and perhaps for later years, occupiers and the occupations of the occupiers), not urban history in its totality. We shall provide the scaffolding and, with the aid of other sources and other methods, we shall build the edifice. Talking about history and class consciousness Gorg Lukacs made a distinction between 'actuality' and reality : 'actuality is what is contingent, or merely existent ; reality is the truth coming into being. The explosive possibilities inside the actual'.<sup>1</sup> We shall present the 'actuality' of Calcutta but as historians we are concerned with the 'reality' of the city. We cannot, however, ignore what is 'contingent' or 'merely existent'. Hence our efforts have not been in vain.

1 Gorg Lukacs, *History and class consciousness*, London, 1970, pp. 7-8.

## STREET INDEX

We have been able to trace 81 streets on Upjohn's map and we have used Computer code numbers to indicate them.

Bancharam Unkdor's Lane (36)  
Beebee Rozia's Lane (53)  
Beniatollah Lane (78)  
Beparrytollah Lane (40)  
Boitaconnah Second Road (59)  
Boitah Khannah Road (104)  
Bow Bazar (3)  
Burial Ground (106)  
Champatollah Street (51)  
Chandney Choke First Lane (30)  
Chandney Choke Second Lane (31)  
Chandney Choke Street (29)  
Chattawallah Gully (44)  
Chitpur Road (2)  
Chocoo Consumah's Lane (63)  
Chowringee Road (107)  
Chunan Gully (45)  
Chunapooker Lane (55)  
Coiroo Mettor's Lane (17)  
Colingah Bazar Street (93)  
Colingah First Lane (94)  
Colingah Moochee Parrah Lane (101)  
Colingah Street (102)  
Colootollah Lane (48)  
Copallytollah Lane (16)  
Cossitollah Street (1)  
Creek Row (42)  
Dingabangah Lane (34)  
Doorgachurn Pethory's Lane (23)  
Durrumtollah Street (84)  
Emambarry Lane (7)  
Emambaug Lane (19)  
Gourchurn Day's Lane (22)

Grant's Lane (4)  
Gungadhue Baboo's Lane (50)  
Harcattah Lane (54)  
Harry Parra Lane (98)  
Hidaram Banerjee's Lane (20)  
Hoozoorimaul's Tank Lane (26)  
Horrinbarry Lane (47)  
Hurry Ghoses Road (77)  
Hyat Khan's Lane (61)  
Jaun Bazar (11)  
Jaun Bazar First Lane (87)  
Jaun Bazar Second Lane (88)  
Jaun Bazar Third Lane (89)  
Jaun Bazar Fourth Lane (90)  
Jaun Bazar Fifth Lane (91)  
Jebbs Lane (11)  
Kenderdine's Lane (14)  
Lollbeary Taggore's Lane (39)  
Meridith's Lane (9)  
Mirzapore Lane (43)  
Moonshy Saderuddy's Lane (73)  
Mudden Dutt's Lane (24)  
Mullungah Lane (38)  
Mussulmanparrah Lane (62)  
Mutchee Bazar (72)  
Nibutollah Lane (37)  
Nimmoo Consumah's Lane (81)  
Nitty Baboos Lane (56)  
Nulpooker Lane (32)  
Ockeel Mistry's Lane (60)  
Old Boitaconnah Bazar Road (58)  
Raja Nabkissen's Lane (74)  
Rampersaud Shah's Lane (71)  
Ruttoo Sircar's Lane (65)  
Sachary Tollah Lane (35)  
Serpentine Lane (27)  
Sitteram Ghoses Lane (64)  
Sobaram Bysack's Lane (80)  
Soorty Bagaun Lane (70)

**Sooterkin Lane (8)**  
**Syed Sally's Lane (75)**  
**Tirettas Bazar Square (46)**  
**Toltullah Bazar Lane (97)**  
**Toltullah Lane (96)**  
**Tuntuneah Bazar Road (76)**  
**Weston's Lane (5)**  
**Williams Lane (57)**  
**Zıgzag Lane (6)**

TABLE I

## LOTS AND PREMISES

Bungalow (B)	1,681
Commercial Residential (CR)	9
Commercial Residential (upper) (CRU)	5
Lower Roomed House (L)	1,990
Upper Roomed House (U)	909
Straw Hut (SH)	23,938
Tiled Hut (TH)	1,262
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Total Residential	29,794
Agricultural (A)	727
Commercial (C)	222
Government (G)	15
Industrial (I)	43
Transport (TR)	23
Social Service (SS)	722*
Brothel (BR)	43
Temples (and other Hindu religious institutions (RH)	2
Mosques (and other Muslim religious institutions) (RM)	13
Vacant (V)	8,487
Shops (S)	1,124
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Total non-residential	... 11,426
Total number of all premises	... 41,220
Total number of Lots	... 6,376















